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## Psychohistory and Austro-Marxist Case Studies

If — which may sound fantastic today — one had to establish a university of psychoanalysis... analytic instruction would include disciplines which are remote from the physician and which he does not come across in his work: cultural history, mythology, the psychology of religion, and literary criticism. Without a good orientation in these fields, the analyst stands helpless before a great part of his material.<sup>1</sup>

Sigmund Freud, 1926.

With the crystallization of psychohistory as a growing historical subdiscipline, Freud's famous vision of 1926 has partially been realized. Fueled by what is sometimes called the crisis of historical research, the field of psychohistory has gained increasing status in American historical methodology since Erik Erikson's breakthrough work *Childhood and Society* (1950) and his now classic *Young Man Luther* (1958). Alongside discussions concerning the role of mentalities in the dynamics of history, psychoanalysis has emerged as history's new alleged savior. America's leading scholarly journals, such as *The American Historical Review*, the *Journal of Modern History* and *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* have published special issues on psychohistory, and the Group for the Use of Psychology in History, an affiliate of the American Historical Association, publishes *The Psychohistorical Review*. Courses in psychohistory are taught at some thirty universities across the US, and the subdiscipline is now offered as a field of doctoral study in some of the foremost universities in the US including Yale, Princeton, MIT, UCLA, and SUNY-Stony Brook. In its fundamental premise, psychohistory staunchly pits itself against structuralist theoretical attempts to discover material determinants in the historical process, and places the individual and his motivations in the center of research. Psychohistory as a method of historical interpretation is surrounded by controversy, mainly since its basic premise contends that the material processes of history are dictated by man's unconscious processes rather than the other way around. The individual human being and the dynamics of his decisions and behavior are placed in the center of the historical process, thus "setting Marx on his head and Hegel back on his feet."<sup>2</sup> The Marxist attempt to structuralize the human condition in terms of the determinant nature of society's conditions is reversed, as the individual's conscious or unconscious decisions are alleged to drive his-

tory forward. Man's social existence is thus not the decisive factor in human behavior, but rather the product of the behavior's roots, to be discerned by psychoanalysis. The field is not, however, uniform, and various branches employing similar psychoanalytical tools have emerged.

This essay is structured into several sections. I shall discuss the premises of psychohistory in general, the roots of the discipline and various types of interpretations within it, and then proceed with a presentation of two case studies conducted by Peter Loewenberg, one of America's foremost psychohistorians. In his analysis, Loewenberg attempts to demonstrate the link between psychoanalysis and certain historical Marxist figures who, according to Loewenberg, must be understood as having shaped the process of Marxist developments in what he sees as one of the twentieth century's bastions of Socialist hope, Austria. The premise is that the events which allegedly destroyed this bastion of hope must be understood in terms of the behavior of the characters in question. My purpose here in the presentation is twofold: First, to present the premises of psychohistory as taught in the American university system, thus facilitating a possible comparison with and eventual discussion on similar developments in Sweden; and second, to provide an example of a psychobiographical analysis through two case studies of Marxist ideologue figures, leading to a discussion on the historiographical value of biographical analyses and psychological investigations.

### General background on psychohistory

Psychoanalysis and history are brothers under the skin, although neither discipline has been willing to acknowledge the fraternity. Both are students of the past; both are deterministic in their search for causes; both are intent on getting to the real meaning of things and to dig beneath the surface; both are sciences of memory, intent on collecting and correcting memories.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Gay

### *Premises of Psychohistory*

Is there in fact such a fundamental link between history and psychoanalysis which makes the field of psychohistory possible in the first place? Loewenberg has asserted that both history and psychoanalysis rely on the arts of interpretation and communication, that both fields "...share the quality of placing the observer in the midst of the field he analyzes and requiring of him a special mixture of identification and detachment..."<sup>4</sup> The concept of psychohistory must thus be defined and distinguished from the study of *mentalities*.

The history of mentalities, which has its roots in Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch's pioneer works of the *Annales* school, may be said to have been influenced by psychological theory, and Febvre in fact once wrote that the historian can "reconstruct (people's) dreams and desires, their often confused, violent

tendencies and their inherent strivings and aspirations, which can only seldom be more exactly described but which nevertheless determine human behavior.”<sup>5</sup> It is, however, important to distinguish between the history of mentalities on the one hand and psychohistory on the other, since the two approaches are in fact directed to quite different objects. First, as opposed to the history of mentalities, psychohistory seeks to explore not the power of elements such as *collective attitudes* or *manifestable collective behavior* patterns, but rather delves deeper into the *individual's* psyche based specifically, albeit with various modifications, on psychoanalytical, or Freudian, methods. One fundamental difference between mentalities and psychoanalysis is that mentalities generally designate groups, whereas the psychohistorian encounters the constant problem of generalizing individual case studies to group phenomena. One of the foremost attempts at applying a highly Freudian psychoanalytical investigation to the group level is provided in Lowenberg's now classic psychohistorical study of “The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort”.<sup>6</sup> Yet the approach again differs sharply from mentalities in that it seeks to investigate the common childhood disturbances of a group of individuals who collectively expressed neurotic behavior of a painfully destructive degree. Furthermore, mentalities may well be said to have developed over time and to have been largely determined by material circumstances, whereas psychohistory displaces the role of material conditions and substitutes them with the dynamics of interpersonal relations. Psychohistory is in fact alleged to be based on clinical psychoanalysis, an undeniably modern development which provides modern theories which psychohistorians seek to apply to the bygone. Mentalities, on the other hand, demand the researcher's immersion into the time being studied, into the attitudes and moods of the day, since they do not operate on the basis of strictly formulated theoretical concepts.

Even the social psychology of the Frankfurt-school rests on a more general psychological level than later American psychohistorical works, which center on intricate and allegedly thoroughly clinical accounts of motivations and intentions behind individual historical figures' behavior by interpreting the experiences of their childhood development and primary relations. In general, American psychohistorical works thus tend to focus on the *historiobiographical*. In a clinical sense, psychohistory thus goes beyond the attempt to apply general psychological principles to historical research, since the core of psychoanalysis and its implementation in historical studies is the specifically Freudian, and *clinically psychoanalytical*, approach.

The school of psychohistory is not, however, a unified one, and the *psycho-social history* of Swedish historian Arne Jarrick, for instance, provides an example of attempts to unify psychological investigations with collective group behavior and of linking psychological analysis to economic history. In his *Psykologisk Socialhistoria* (1985), Jarrick begins by discussing the premises and limitations of economic history, the psychological principles which he finds inherent in neoclassical theory, and argues for the importance and worth of

psychological analyses in history. Jarrick contends that psychoanalysis is a valuable tool in historical research and may be employed as integrated with other interpretations from the social sciences to provide a more complete picture. Jarrick proceeds with a discussion of Freudian principles, which he seeks to unite with Piaget's cognitive psychological premises concerning the maturation process of the child, the process from *egocentricity* to *decentricity*. The stages of this process, which Jarrick simplifies to those of *child* and *adult*, are central to understanding the socialization of the individual. Jarrick expands at length on Piaget and concludes that central premises of both psychoanalysis and Piaget's cognitive psychology may be integrated. In a 1982 article entitled "Freud och historien", Jarrick pointed out the weaknesses of pure Freudian theories as applicable to historical research, but concluded that they could nevertheless serve as valuable tools, bearing in mind the limitations such as Freud's determinism and his failure to account for historical change.<sup>7</sup> In his dissertation, Jarrick thus discusses psychoanalytical mechanisms in order to demonstrate the value of the psychological approach to social history and argues that *psychosocial history* is in fact a field in its own right. The author also attempts to draw on both the history of mentalities and the methods of psychohistory, apparently in order to allow these two approaches to somehow "compensate" for each other's weaknesses.

I shall not delve deeper into the validity or the merits of this particular type of analysis, but shall content myself with saying that Jarrick's work is a thought-provoking although unusually eclectic blend of various schools of thought and different approaches. What is important in the context of this essay, however, is that the main question which Jarrick wishes to address is one of historiography, on the worth of psychoanalytical method in research and on the possibility of employing psychological theories on studies of social groups. Jarrick's synthesis of various elements represents a significant step away from traditional psychohistory itself, and he in fact himself points out that psychosocial history stands as a field of its own. Yet I have brought up his dissertation here since his study represents the primary attempt at a full study on the historiographic employment of psychoanalysis in Swedish research, and its main value as an academic work lies in its thorough discussion on important psychohistorical premises and on its introduction of and reflections on a method which continues to be controversial in international research. As was mentioned earlier, however, the discipline of psychohistory itself is diverse.

Before proceeding with the particular case studies here presented, it is therefore necessary to first define the divergences in various schools of psychohistory which are more traditional than Jarrick's approach. There are, broadly speaking, three distinct approaches to psychohistory, each of which is also outlined and further elaborated on in Jarrick's dissertation.

### 1. Reductionism

This approach often traces all manifestations of adult behavior back to the ear-

liest stages of an individual's life, focusing on early experiences and the earliest development of human relations. Certain adherents of this approach emphasize the function of instincts or urges and their dynamics on human behavior and the subsequent development of society. Resulting psychological conflicts within the individual provide the spark for the historical process. Hence, history is found itself *reduced* to the inner fight of the individual.

## 2. Fusionism

Represented by Erik Erikson's brand of psychohistory, this approach seeks to reject Freudian determinism concerning the all-importance of the early childhood years, and highlights the lifelong dynamics of personality formation instead of certain early formative incidents and relations. The individual continues to change and form his personality which thus determines his behavior throughout the life cycle. Erikson furthermore underlines the interaction between individual and society, the process of mutual adaptation and the significance of changes in historical circumstances.

## 3. Sociological psychohistory

Jarrick describes this approach as "having picked up where Erikson left off".<sup>8</sup> Criticizing certain classical Freudian premises as being "inherently ahistorical",<sup>9</sup> proponents of this approach accept Erikson's views and wish to further integrate them with sociology. Erikson accepts Freud's division of the id, the ego and the superego, and the notion that the family is the basis of information for the young child including the Oedipal phenomenon. Adherents of the third approach argue that the child also registers information directly from society without transmission via the family, and thus seek to highlight the sociological aspect of psychology.

At the core of all of these variations in analysis lies the applied conceptualization of the determinant power of the *unconscious*, of the effects of unresolved *inhibitions*, and of the dynamics of *transference* and *countertransference* defined as "...the bringing of unconscious patterns of feelings, attitudes, behaviors, fantasies, loves and hates, from other persons and periods of one's life into the present."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the particular subject in question *transfers* subconscious and deeply lodged unresolved conflicts of his life onto outside objects. Inhibitions, defined as the restriction of an ego-function, may cause conflict between the conscious and the unconscious state. Such unresolved dilemmas may lead to *neurosis*, with the subject existing in a state of constant inner struggle driving forward his quest for a final resolution to the conflict. Each apparently "irrational" act would thus be the logical explosion of this anxiety in clinical terms, desperately seeking an outlet and a final resolution: A latent murderous rage against a parent, for instance, could lead to the eventual murder of a person other than that parent, representing a symbolic resolution, determined by the unconscious. The resolution of neurosis represents the chronic quest of the individual, the search for peace which accompanies the individual

through his life cycle and which is rooted far back in his formative years. The conflict between the id, the ego, and the superego is of central importance to the persistence of neurosis, as is the Freudian “pleasure principle”. The ego strives to deny the instincts and urges which lie with the id in order to avoid anxiety, and the superego forbids the gratifying of instincts out of the fear of punishment. These are basic Freudian principles on which much of psychoanalysis was founded and on which psychohistory builds.

Psychohistory, which is a synthesis of fields applying these psychoanalytical concepts to the realm of historical research, is furthermore based on the conviction that “...the history of humanity is a gigantic metabolism of individual life cycles”<sup>11</sup> and that only thorough psychoanalytical analyses of *individuals* or *in some cases, groups of individuals*, can shed light on any given historical event/series of events. History as an academic discipline is thus the study of mankind and of the flow of humanly important events and experiences. According to William M. Runyan, a clinical psychologist and Associate Professor in Social Welfare who has edited a compilation of classic psychohistorical works at Berkeley University, the discipline of history “...must attend not only to the ordered, the structured and lawlike aspects of human and social reality, but also to the disorderly, the particular, the idiosyncratic, the transient, the random”<sup>12</sup>. The emphasis is on the irrational rather than on the logical, on the emotional rather than on the intellectual, on the unconscious rather than on the calculated. The true causes behind any given event are allegedly determined in the unconscious patterns which drive the actions of the individuals involved, and the event itself is the ultimate expression of the fundamental anxieties at the core of the particular human being. For all the questions which the traditional historian has failed to answer and for all the tragedies which scar the face of mankind’s history, psychohistory wishes to and claims to succeed in delivering a new and more complete medium of analysis.

### *Roots of Psychohistory as a Discipline*

The first actual psychohistorical analysis was provided in Sigmund Freud’s study *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910) which was followed by a series of shorter pieces on Goethe, Dostoyevsky, war, and the classic psychoanalytical works *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). The concept of utilizing psychology and biographical analyses in the study of history was first advocated by Professor James Harvey Robinson of Columbia University in the early decades of the twentieth century. Yet early psychobiographical analyses were criticized as being reductionist and unsatisfactory, and not until after World War II did psychohistory truly pick up steam. Since then, the field of psychohistory has crystallized in the recognition that new methods of analyses need to be applied in an attempt to make sense out of mankind’s catastrophic yet repeated irrationalities which culminated in the atrocities of World World II and Nazism.

The conflict which transformed the European continent into an open wound ended in violence only to leave a Europe divided by a geopolitical faultline, where fear became the fundamental impulse dividing the world into two camps waging frigid warfare on each other. The cruelties of World War II and the terror of its legacy reached dimensions which seemed to defy traditional historical explanation, and it is in the aftermath of these developments that psychohistory began its ascent as a recognized discipline. Attempts to explain the rise of Hitler and National Socialism led to the recognition of the irrational and the neurotic as major forces to be reckoned with in the cycle of human history, and the Office of Strategic Services produced a psychobiographical study of Hitler already during World War II.

Numerous works have been published since, including analyses of Luther (Erikson 1958), Gandhi (Erikson 1969), Van Gogh (Runyan 1982), Woodrow Wilson (Edwin Weinstein 1978), Stalin (Robert Tucker 1985), Heinrich Himmler (Loewenberg 1985) and the now classic piece on the Nazi youth cohort (Loewenberg, 1985) earlier mentioned. Alice Miller's study on the childhood of Adolf Hitler has been translated into Swedish and is also a modern example of psychoanalysis applied to historical research. Miller focuses on the effects on childhood in her work *I begynnelsen var uppfostran* and discusses what she labels "black pedagogy". Her emphasis is virtually entirely on the effects of the experiences of the young child in relation to his parents, and she thus adheres notably to basic Freudian principles. Seeking to inform parents of the elements in upbringing which destroy the child's wellbeing, Miller argues that the messages which growing children receive from their parents create a fundamental lifelong conflict, which "many of us must pay for with severe neuroses".<sup>13</sup> Adult behavior and various disturbances which are manifested in acts of violence or criminality may thus be traced back to the earliest of experiences.<sup>14</sup> Miller seeks to employ psychoanalytical tools in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the life processes of certain characters.<sup>15</sup> Her analysis on the childhood of three historical figures including Hitler is well known, and when I read her work, I was struck by her strong adherence to a reductionist approach in her psychohistorical accounts. In its basic assumptions, this type of investigation lies near the traditional psychohistorical interpretations such as that provided by Loewenberg. A 1988 article in *Historische Zeitschrift* entitled "Friedrich Wilhelm I und Die Preussische Armee: Versuch einer Psychohistorischen Deutung" employs a similar approach in an attempt to explain the monarchy of the Soldier King and the dynamics behind his adult behavior and actions, by tracing the developments of his early childhood and the permanent identity crises which these allegedly helped crystallize. Anger, aggression and anxiety are the expression of childhood wants and lack of security which have left behind them a disintegrated self-image and worldview, a permanent conflict which manifested itself in the nature of Friedrich Wilhelm I's monarchy. Basic Freudian mechanisms are once again clearly at work in this article, in which the authors highlight the determinant nature of childhood experiences

to the adult's self-image and projection of disturbances onto the outside world.<sup>16</sup>

Although psychoanalysis itself has developed further after Freud, the fundamental principles thus continue to form the basis for much of the existing psychohistorical accounts. I have chosen to present Loewenberg's particular method of analysis, exemplified by the study on the Austrian Social Democratic leaders Adler and Bauer, for the following reasons. *Firstly*, and most simply, the demise of Austro-Marxism itself is a topic which interests me, and I am thus curious about various investigations of this question. *Secondly*, it may be fruitful to elaborate on other analyses which Loewenberg has produced besides the famous piece on the Nazi cohort, which together have given him a foremost place in American psychohistory. *Thirdly*, since the eclecticism of Jarrick's work distinguishes him notably from traditional psychohistory and particularly from common *reductionist* analyses, it may be interesting to present precisely such an approach in a Swedish journal and perhaps stimulate a discussion and comparison of different interpretations within the field. Furthermore, Jarrick names a number of known psychohistorians in his dissertation, but does not discuss Loewenberg at any point. *Fourthly*, the figures which are under study are not notorious monster figures like the Hitlers or Stalins of history, nor are they household-names such as Gandhi or Martin Luther whose fame automatically attracts biographical attention. These characters are more subtle. Loewenberg's study of the Adlers and Otto Bauer is an attempt to explain the downfall of Austro-Marxism, an effort to depict the neurotic danger which in his view largely led to the demise of Austrian Social Democracy. *Finally*, Loewenberg's study on a few figures in early western Social Democracy is in fact a highly controversial psychohistorical analysis and ushers in a broader and crucial historiographic debate.

Loewenberg is himself German-born residing in the US since his childhood, and his primary focus is often on Austria and Germany. His analysis centers *not* on Marxism itself as a theory, but rather on a particular time and a particular place which witnessed the implementation of social legislation based on a radical theory which offered a mediating position between Russian Bolshevism and Western revisionist socialism. Loewenberg's justification for choosing to focus on Austro-Marxism is that "Nowhere in the world was the quest for a social order conducive to decent human life pursued with greater idealism and greater success"<sup>17</sup>, and that the Austrian brand of Marxism provided a true social model for the world during its heyday. Municipal housing, kindergartens and sports facilities testified to the institutionalization of material social achievements in Vienna, and Social Democratic successes at the national level included the eight-hour workday; paid vacations; collective bargaining; regulation of women's, children's and night labor; health, disability and accident insurance; state assistance for mothers and children; public health measures; and the creation of the *Arbeiterkammern*. Yet the Social Democratic party of Vienna collapsed amidst the domestic turmoil of 1934, and the Social Demo-



crats of Central Europe proved ineffectual in dealing with the rise of Fascism in the 1920s and early 1930s. Why? Loewenberg launches his analysis after finding the flood of existing studies on these events unsatisfactory, contending that available works have failed to examine "...the psychodynamics of the leadership of Austrian Socialism as an expression of that movement's ambivalence."<sup>18</sup> The author argues that founders and leaders are symbolic of the "emotional disposition of movements", and postulates that leadership studies provide the opportunity to trace the minutiae of decision making with the precision of clinical psychoanalysis.<sup>19</sup>

In a case study on the leading figures of Austro-Marxism, the father and son team Victor and Friedrich Adler, and the parliamentary leader and major Austro-Marxist theorist of the First Austrian Republic Otto Bauer, Loewenberg wishes to convince us that "...fantasies and behavior in specific crises tell us much about the personified ambivalence of the group which chose and supported these leaders."<sup>20</sup> Loewenberg's study on the leadership of Austro-Marxism whose forum and laboratory was in "Red Vienna" in the 1920s<sup>21</sup> is presented in the ensuing section.

### Austro—Marxism

#### *Victor and Friedrich Adler: Generational Conflict*

The saga of the Adlers is the most loving and deadly story of idealism and tragedy in modern political history.

Peter Loewenberg

As were other Marxist theories and programs, Austro-Marxism was torn between conflicting political models — revolutionary and integrationist — from its founding in 1888 to the Anschluss of 1938. The former program rejected consolidation with the existing state and promoted the concept of inevitable violence in the form of a revolutionary solution, whereas the latter was aimed at overcoming conflict and advocated the upward social and economic mobility of the proletariat and their sociopolitical integration with the existing state in increasingly reformed form. Loewenberg focuses on this tension between alternative tactics in crisis and draws a parallel to the lives, politics and actions of the first family of Austro-Marxism, the Adlers. Victor Adler (1852—1918) founded the Austrian Social Democratic Worker's Party and was its leader until 1918. His son Friedrich, the party secretary, committed the only act of individual terror in over a century of western Social Democracy by assassinating the Austrian Prime Minister Count Sturgkh, emerged as a hero to both Bolsheviks and Socialists and eventually became leader of the Second International in the 1920s and 1930s. For several decades following his murder of the PM, Friedrich Adler went on to play an important role in international socialism.

Loewenberg reconstructs the relationship between Victor and his son Friedrich and places the twosome within the general atmosphere of their home.

His point is to trace the development of a murderous rage in Friedrich directed towards the father which is eventually transferred onto a powerful figure, Count Sturgkh, in order to resolve the unconscious fury cloaked under the rhetoric of ideology, and to explain the fact that Friedrich was ultimately able to integrate instead of continuing to rebel. The debate between either “consolidate with” or “rebel against” on the *ideological* level is thus brought back down to the *individual* level in a study of these leaders who are seen as an expression of the entire movement’s ambivalence.

Loewenberg recounts the martyr-hero image which Friedrich formed of his deeply idealistic physician/politician father Victor, and traces the development of disagreements and conflicts within the Adler family during Friedrich’s youth. Since childhood, Friedrich aspired to follow his father’s commitment to improving the human condition, yet ultimately reversed his father’s specifically non-violent methods by committing murder. The idealistic father who treated destitute patients free of charge is described as the young boy’s unwavering hero, who was to feel “...absolute solidarity...” with his father for the rest of his life.<sup>22</sup> The extreme suppression of anger and the consequent intrafamilial frustration in the home are discussed, and Loewenberg describes the “...marriage of quiet sacrifice...” and a family which never argued. The severe depressive episodes of Friedrich’s mother, Emma, are disclosed, as are telling moments such as the following incident described in Emma Adler’s personal papers:

Packing his luggage, Victor wished to lay his revolver in a box, and said that he was certain it was not loaded, so certain in fact, that to test it, he aimed it at me and pulled the trigger — With a great crack the bullet that was in the chamber flew past me and lodged in the window frame across the street.<sup>23</sup>

Loewenberg interprets this incident as the expression of Victor’s unconscious murderous rage which planted the seeds for Friedrich’s eventual crime. The incident reflects the father’s frustrated ambivalence towards his wife, and indirectly communicated to the son that violence was an alternative form of resolution. The repressed impulse of the parent is thus passed onto the child in an unarticulated manner.<sup>24</sup>

The ambiguous relationship of the son to the father, which was to eventually drive Friedrich to murder, is evident in a letter which Friedrich sent to Victor on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Social Democratic Worker’s party, which included the following excerpt:

You never wanted to educate, and never devoted anything to me. And yet *your influence was the decisive one on my life due to what you were....* I wish to tell you that, whatever happens to me, I am grateful that you were a *personality and not a father*. You would have deprived me of the highest that I have known in life, if you had ever been considerate of us.<sup>25</sup>

The outbreak of World War I and Victor Adler’s passive “realistic” position on the conflict is recalled by Friedrich as “...my most painful experience” which was followed by “painful scenes and confrontations with his father at the fam-

ily table.”<sup>26</sup> Such moments are seen as contributing to the crystallization of an anger which was eventually released through the murder of an authoritative figure and the pain/pleasure of the punishment which followed.<sup>27</sup> The act is interpreted as the final victory over the father: First, by topping Victor’s numerous jail sentences for treason during Friedrich’s childhood, Friedrich is unconsciously affirming success: I have done what he has done, and have topped him. Second, through the murder, “Fritz successfully displaced intrafamilial aggression to a political figure with the highest moral rationalization — namely, peace, democracy, and socialism”, and, after acting out murderous impulses which the father had only fantasied about, receiving the father’s defense despite his revulsion for the son’s act.<sup>28</sup> In his later life, Friedrich appeared well integrated with his society, non-violent and anxiety-free, having found a “successful” neurotic compromise formation par excellence.<sup>29</sup> The conflicts of the party itself had thus been *symbolized by the generational conflict between father and son*, and had been brought to a climax through the explosion of Friedrich’s internal conflict. The personal crisis fitted the ideological dilemma and was acted out in tragedy by a man who continued to play a role in international socialism.

#### *Otto Bauer and the Crisis of the First Austrian Republic*

He had a deep personal fright of the decision to act... Bauer’s inflexible, doctrinaire posture, his maintenance of a once-adopted position — not out of strength, since under the pressure of an apparent “historical law of development” he would in the end retreat, rather because he missed the optimal moment to pull back due to theoretical considerations and discussions — *substantially contributed to the defeats of Social Democracy.*<sup>30</sup>

Adam Wandruszka

Otto Bauer, the parliamentary leader and foremost theorist during the First Austrian Republic “...was the personification of the ambivalence of Social Democracy in the 1920s and 1930s.”<sup>31</sup> The man behind the captivating speaker and brilliant intellectual was, according to psychoanalysis, an obsessional neurotic, driven by internal conflict which ultimately handicapped his ability to act and accompanied the downfall of embattled Austro-Marxism. Much of the material employed in this study is from the case book of “Dora”, Otto Bauer’s sister who was a patient of none other than Sigmund Freud. Details of the children’s emotional development reveal the crystallization of Otto Bauer’s fateful ambivalence and an inability to act in crisis, characteristics which proved detrimental to an entire movement.

The most striking features of Bauer’s political style were his formally revolutionary ideals contrasted with his absolutely non-violent operational tactics, coupled with an obsessional need to theorize. There was always a discordance between his words and his deeds, to such an extreme as to fit into Freud’s phenomenology of the obsessional neurotic:

*Doubt* makes itself felt in the intellectual field and little by little it begins to gnaw at what is usually most certain. The whole position ends up in an ever-increasing degree of indecision, loss of energy and restriction of freedom. At the same time, the obsessional neurotic is often extraordinarily self-willed and as a rule he has intellectual gifts above the average... and is more than ordinarily correct in his behavior.<sup>32</sup>

Loewenberg traces two major forces which determined Bauer's adult behavior: The painful ambiguity of his Jewish identity, and an unresolved oedipal aggression. Bauer wrote and theorized at great length on the Jewish identity and attempted to come to a definition of *nation*, yet ultimately contradicted himself by proposing that the Jews formed a *nation*, while denying them national autonomy. Bauer's writings were severely criticized by Lenin who ridiculed "...the absurdity of Bauer's invention..."<sup>33</sup>, and by Stalin, who highlighted the inconsistencies in Bauer's thinking.<sup>34</sup> The entire question represented Bauer's first and fundamental internal conflict based on the issue of his own ambivalent national identity. After his works on nationalism, Bauer contributed to Austro-Marxism with four theories: (1) the theory of "balance of class forces", (1921) (2) a variant of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", (1926), (3) the theory of the "pause", (1928), and (4) the theory of "obstruction" of 1930. With each theory, the conclusion was that the optimal position for Austro-Marxists was to wait and do nothing since conflict would eventually be resolved without danger or confrontation.<sup>35</sup> Ambivalence and passivity became Otto's trademarks, and the foundations for this behavior were laid during his childhood experiences.

Freud's records reveal an adulterous affair which Otto Bauer's father Philipp maintained with a married woman, whose husband accepted this state of things in exchange for sexual attention from Philipp's 14-year old daughter, Otto's sister, known in the records as "Dora". The hostility towards the father allowed for excessive identification with the mother, who was a person so aggressive, controlling and guilt-inducing that Freud labeled her as nearly psychotic.<sup>36</sup> Otto grew up as the passive child, in contrast to his expressively angry and exploited sister, and thus lived his life in the quest to become for the mother what the father had failed to be: an idealistic man. The father justified his extramarital relationship to his children by pointing out that "...his children had every reason for being grateful to Frau. K."<sup>37</sup> Otto Bauer's political technique of sharing guilt with the enemies and justifying his moral superiority was thus bred in the childhood home. In embracing theoretically revolutionary principles, Otto was the savior of his father's employees from vile capitalist exploiters like his father. Yet the conflictual relationship to the father also laid the breeding ground for inaction and fed the ambivalence of Otto's character: Were he to implement his revolutionary goals, Otto would have to dispossess men like his father. In a combination of affection/disgust towards the father, a man becomes "...inhibited in expressing aggression against authority, even if that combat is displaced to sociopolitical grounds."<sup>38</sup> Not until the death of both of his parents did Otto take a wife, a woman ten years his senior and described as strong-

minded and critical, which Loewenberg labels a surrogate mother figure. After twelve years of marriage, he took a mistress ten years his junior, thereby perpetuating the father's "sin".

Otto Bauer's humanitarian ideals and inflexible ethics replaced the shattered ideal of a fallen father figure, and Otto became the powerful, intellectual, preaching leader. However, "...the tragedy for Austrian socialism is that in reality, Bauer was a weak father, inept, impotent, and castrated."<sup>39</sup> With his ambivalence, he could attack the father figure but protect the enemy fathers from violent aggression. In Socialism, he thus found his cause and acted out his lifelong internal combat. Yet in the end, he was unable to deal with real crises, and his followers who adored him "...were discouraged, disheartened, and defeated. *Bauer's personal conflict fitted the tragic ambivalence of Austro-Marxism.*"<sup>40</sup>

### Concluding Remarks and Critique

This paper has served to provide a general and rather sketchy summary of some important psychohistorical premises, and of Peter Loewenberg's psychobiographical analysis of the Austro-Marxist leadership in particular, fueled by the conviction that the key decisions made by certain influential men reflect the psychodynamics of their formative years and give the historical process its basic dynamics. Drenched in internal conflict, a personal combat manifests itself on the political arena, steering the flow of outside events and thus shaping history.

Much of the debate on psychohistory lies on questions regarding the fallibility of psychoanalytical conclusions and their consequent uncertainty for historical analysis. Yet before attending to this question, we must first understand another and more fundamental problem with psychohistory, one which reminds us of an inherent debate between historians themselves.

### *On Biographical Analyses in History*

As historians, we are forced not only to examine the validity and correctness of our results, as is done in other sciences, but must additionally analyze and argue over the very nature of our field. Historians are in the peculiar position of arguing with each other over whether they are to understand or to explain; of whether they are to treat each incident as unique or attempt draw general causal connections on a higher level of abstraction, and of whether they must focus on the power of the individual or that of structures. Thus, although Yale psychohistorian Peter Gay has asserted that both history and psychoanalysis are *deterministic in their search for causes*, this claim strikes me as missing the crucial point which must first be established. *Which causes are the two disciplines searching for?* Psychoanalysis provides us with studies and accounts the behavior of an individual and may thus provide a *cause* for the given subject's

behavior patterns, but can this truly be applied as the cause for a historical event or phenomenon? Do the *causes* for Friedrich Adler's behavior tell us anything significant about the causes for the demise of Austro-Marxism? The entire series of contextual elements becomes reduced and overshadowed by this type of analysis.

At the heart of this question lies a disagreement over which forces are at work in recorded history, involving the often-posed question of whether man's conditions determine his behavior, or vice versa. Psychohistory seems to somehow assume that man is master, *albeit unconsciously*, over the concrete conditions of his world, in the sense that his material existence is driven by his forces, his decisions, the essence of his thought patterns and reactions. Naturally, the difference is not absolute or clear-cut, and a type of mutual cycle between individual/structure may be observed, placing the historian in an endless debate on which came first, the chicken or the egg? Without falling into this intellectual mousetrap, it must be said that any psychobiographical account applied to history clearly overvalues the role of the individual and his power to determine the course of history, and this type of search for causes is quite different than the search which historians should, in my view, be engaged in. We do not seek to merely understand Bauer, Adler, or even Hitler or Stalin's behavior, but rather to place these individuals in the contexts which made their rise to power possible. What do Bauer's and Adler's actions truly reveal about the complexities of the historical "tragedy of Austrian socialism"? Although overly positivistic attitudes about history's nomothetic character may in their turn obscure the human element in history, the psychoanalytical alleged "search for causes", on the other hand, limits itself to the cause for the unique and the particular behavior, not for the complex course of events or the patterns in history. Thus, the idea that the relation between history and psychoanalysis should be such an obvious one leaves me rather perplexed. It assumes that biographical accounts are necessarily the main part of historical research.

The value of biographies in history must be scrutinized before one can begin to criticize the psychoanalytical tools employed in psychohistory. Firstly, it must be said that different research traditions dominate in different countries, and the US has consistently produced historical studies focusing more on individual leaders than, for instance, has been the case in Sweden. Both domestic and foreign policy history as taught in US universities have undoubtedly been based relatively commonly on biographical accounts. Books on Hitler, Roosevelt, Stalin, Woodrow Wilson, Truman and Eisenhower, for instance, all figure in history courses in American universities, and much interpretation on historical events has been based on these accounts. The individual plays a central role in US historiography. That is not to say, naturally, that structural analyses have somehow been missing in American universities, but it is rather to say that, relatively speaking, the emphasis on people as history-makers has been higher in the US than in Sweden.

My question here is not whether or not studies of individuals are valuable

or not, since it is clear that the human dimension must be present in historical research. Studies of individuals are important in completing the historical account, in enlivening the record and in doing justice to the human factor in decision-making. However, the manner in which a biography is conducted is of high importance to the value of the given study. No study of an individual human being should be allowed to overwhelm the circumstances in which he/she developed, or should in any way be taken out of the context which produced him/her. People must be carefully placed within the societies which produced them, and must be analyzed in terms of the norms and circumstances according to which they acted. This naturally makes it more difficult to reconstruct people's behavior and lifestyle the further back in time we go, and the more physical distance we thus have to the subject in question.

Erik Lönnroth published an article in a 1986 issue of *Historisk Tidskrift* entitled "Det biografiska synsättet", where he deals with precisely this question. Lönnroth points out that biographies must seek not to unanalytically recount day to day activities, nor to provide a gossip story of any individual's private affairs, but rather to investigate the reasons for the subject's behavior patterns and the manner in which the subject influenced his environment.<sup>41</sup> Lönnroth furthermore argues that it is difficult to correctly capture thought and behavior patterns without launching a deep analysis of the traces left behind by the subject at hand geared towards the fulfillment of an action or an incident. A highly critical scrutiny of the sources at hand is required for studies of the recent past as well as of distant history, yet it is increasingly difficult to deliver an accurate analysis of an individual from a time utterly foreign to us. Different time periods entail culture, attitudes and conditions, giving the action or event its very character, its historical meaning. These are elements which may be traced and outlined, but perhaps never thoroughly understood, and the contextual requirement of a true biography therefore fades in line with the amount of time bygone. In other words, the closer in time the subject is to the researcher, the easier it is for the researcher to gain full grasp of the person as a whole, and the more validity the biography will hold.

In this context, the question of biographies in history is thus linked to the manner in which psychohistory in particular employs the account of the individual. In Spillman's article mentioned earlier (1988), the question of biography is dealt with in a section which discusses the importance of early childhood experiences and the psychoanalytical model employed. The importance of tracking such experiences in the development of an individual is understood as crucial to providing a worthwhile biographical account of the adult.<sup>42</sup> Is this view indeed fruitful? *Firstly*, it is true biographies may have their worth, yet with psychohistory blossoming as a discipline in its own right, such accounts no longer become a part of historical research, but rather become the absolutely central subject of analysis. Explanations become monocausal and exclusive in their focus. Biographies must fall under the historical discipline alongside other modes of analysis, yet psychohistory reflects its own genre entirely, it

becomes a particular form of historiography which concentrates on the individual, or at most, on certain groups of individuals such as the Nazi youth cohort. As has been discussed earlier in this essay, the individual is alleged to determine the course of history, and more specifically, his earliest experiences and unresolved neuroses fester to the point of action, hence, a decisive moment in history. *Secondly*, as Lönnroth suggests, long time spans between the action under investigation and the world of the researcher may severely impede a biographical account. In the case of psychohistory, the problem is clear. The application of the modern theoretical tools of psychoanalysis testify to the existence of quite a different historical context for the researcher on the one hand, and the subject on the other. Psychoanalysis involves clinical terms and premises which are seen as absolutes, and which allegedly enable the psychohistorian to understand the subject in a manner which the subject himself could not. The psychohistorian thus applies his theories to another time, another culture, another mentality, and a certain human being whose conditions differed sharply from those which we know today. Thus, if psychohistory is to prosper as a discipline, to what extent can this field provide satisfying analyses of individuals of one, two, or three hundred years ago? It could be said that this problem is encountered with all types of historical analysis, that all of our academic tools fail to transport the historian to the realm of thought and behavior which he studies. However, since the focus is so utterly on the personal experiences of the individual, psychohistory necessarily plucks the subject out of his social context, other modes of explanation are left unheeded, and the biography may thus be of only limited value. This leads us into the problems of psychological interpretation.

### *On the Fallibility of Psychological Interpretations*

If Loewenberg assumes that a murderous impulse testifies to personal neurosis, he will seek the source of this neurosis in the individual in Freudian terms, and may indeed succeed in finding it. Yet would it not make sense to carefully analyze the attitude towards violence in general in society at the time and, for instance, within the particular social class, as well the degree of such tendencies in society at large during the years in question? Is it not quite easy to discern roots of a neurotic tendency if one specifically looks for it? A murder today may not be analyzed with the same premises and tools as a murder of, say, several hundred years ago, since the entire phenomenon may have been viewed quite differently and for a variety of reasons. Psychoanalytical tools seek to transcend time, and are therefore ahistorical as applied by Loewenberg. The account becomes fixed on explaining all adult behavior according to highly personal experiences which would thus have to resemble each other independently of time context.

This brings us to another severe weakness, namely that of *arguing from correlations to causes*. We may, for instance, be able to establish that many histori-



cal figures labeled neurotic came from broken homes, yet we will never be able to account for the multitude of individuals produced from similar situations who never had the benefit, so to speak, to make front page news, nor will we thus be able to determine an axiomatic relationship between neurosis and broken homes: A correlation does not indicate *anything* about the causal consequences involved. It would be just as likely, for instance, that some other given element would be correlated to broken homes and thus form a part of a causal sequence. We are thus left just as puzzled as we were before our analysis of neurotic historical figures. Why were they neurotic? We may just as easily argue for a hereditary cause rather than the Freudian environmentalistic one. Causes are not revealed, and since the exceptions to any alleged rule would necessarily abound, no generalizations can be drawn, *even when limited to the incident or time period in question*. In other words, proving that, for instance, many of the Nazi youth cohort members had similar negative childhood experiences in Germany rooted in the defeat of their fathers in World War I, says nothing on the mass of youths who may have shared precisely the same experience without joining the Nazi movement, or for the many Nazi youths outside of Germany and in later generations who could not have shared this experience in the least. Attempts to generalize on the conclusions of an allegedly clinical study must thus be labeled as speculative at best, and misdirected at worst. Furthermore, there is the simple fact known to us all from our own lives, that if you look for a certain trait in a person, you're bound to find it. In light of the facts known about the Nazis and the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, it may not be hard to discern neuroses and claim to discover their alleged roots. The mass of neurotic individuals inhabiting our world without participating in mass destruction is probably quite overwhelming, as is the mass of individuals well on the path to destruction who may not share any such visible formative steps towards neurosis.

### *Final Reflections*

I have taken a clearly critical stance of the particular genre which I have presented through two case studies. My intention was thus not to act as proponent for this type of analysis, but mainly to present a method for the sake of imparting perhaps new information and engage readers in future discussion. However, despite my scepticism, readers will hopefully have found the case studies here presented captivating as I did. The psychoanalytical portraits undoubtedly enliven the historical record and provides an intimate addition to historical research. My reaction to psychohistory as an academic field and to the specific case studies which have been dealt with here is thus a combination of fascination and doubt. Although the psychoanalytical accounts which Loewenberg and other psychohistorians have provided are undeniably interesting and often insightful, such allegedly scientific studies of the human psyche must not be permitted to overwhelm or replace research on material circumstances and

structures as determinants in human behavior, and the historian must not limit himself to the study of individual human beings as the driving forces through time. Furthermore, in studies of individuals, biographies must carefully be placed within context and must be related to other modes of interpretation. It appears to me that psychohistory in its premises *would necessarily* undermine other research: In fact, the pretensions of psychohistory are illuminated by Loewenberg himself, as he quotes an author in affirming that

The true history of the human race is the history of human affection. In comparison with it, *all other histories — including economic history — are false.*<sup>43</sup>

The ultimate and stimulating task which remains before the historian, and one which goes beyond the provinces of this essay, is to understand in what manner we are to best employ the benefits of this method combined with other existing approaches and discover a history which is indeed true.

## Notes

1. Sigmund Freud quoted in Peter Loewenberg, *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985, p.18.
2. Lloyd deMause, "The Independence of Psychohistory" in Geoffrey Cocks and Travis L. Crosby, *Psychohistory*, Yale University Press, 1987, p.54.
3. Peter Gay, "Psychoanalysis in History", from 1984, in William McKinely Runyan, *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.107.
4. Loewenberg, 1985, p.4
5. Lucien Febvre, *Revue historique*, 1929 cited in Arne Jarrick, *Psykologisk Socialhistoria*, Stockholms universitet, 1985, p.27.
6. In Loewenberg, 1985, p.240.
7. Arne Jarrick, "Freud och historien", Scandia, Vol.48:1, 1982, pp.107—138.
8. Jarrick, 1985, p.37.
9. Weinstein/Platt cited in Jarrick, 1985, p.37
10. Loewenberg, 1985, p.4.
11. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, New York: W.W Norton and co, 1950, p.16.
12. Runyan, p.47.
13. Alice Miller, *I begynnelsen var uppfostran*, Wahlström och Widstrand, Stockholm 1991, p.71 (Original in German).
14. *Ibid.*, See the introduction, particularly pp.10—12.
15. *Ibid.*, p.9.
16. Kurt Spillman and Kati Spillman, "Friedrich Wilhelm I und die preussische Armee. Versuch einer psychohistorischen Deutung", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 246:3, 1988, pp.549—591.
17. Loewenberg, 1985, p.136.
18. *Ibid.*, p.137.
19. *Ibid.*, p.99.
20. *Op.Cit.*, p.137.
21. Loewenberg, 1985, p.136.
22. *Ibid.*, p.157.
23. Emma Adler quoted in Loewenberg, 1985, p.142.
24. Adelaide Johnson's analysis provided in Loewenberg, p.142 and p.156.
25. Friedrich Adler to Victor Adler, quoted in Loewenberg, p.146. The italics for emphasis are mine.
26. *Ibid.*, p.149.
27. Friedrich Adler was sentenced to death on May 9, 1917, yet was freed by Kaiser Karl on November 1, 1918, as the Habsburg monarchy was in dissolution. Friedrich emerged from captivity as a hero, and was invited by Lenin and Trotsky to be Honorary Secretary of the Third International in January 1919, which he declined.
28. Loewenberg, 1985, p.156.
29. *Ibid.*
30. The Austrian historian Adam Wandruszka quoted in Loewenberg, p.181. The italics for emphasis are mine.
31. Loewenberg, 1985, p.161.
32. Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" (1916—1917), cited in Loewenberg, 1985, p.168.
33. V.I Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question", cited in Loewenberg, p.166.
34. Stalin adamantly pointed out the irrationality of Bauer's terminology, such as "community of fate", and accused Bauer of being an idealistic spiritualist.
35. Loewenberg, 1985, p. 178. Since the most important issue here is the fact that these theories held certain types of conclusions, I have not described the content of each in this paper.
36. *Ibid.*, p.194.

37. Ibid., p.191.
38. Op.Cit., p.191.
39. Op.Cit., p.199.
40. Loewenberg, 1985, p.200.
41. Erik Lönnroth, "Det biografiska synsättet", *Historisk Tidskrift*, 1986:3, p.289.
42. Spillman and Spillman, 1988, p.550—551.
43. E. M Forster's "De Senectute" quoted in Loewenberg, p.vi.