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Resiliency or Resignation: Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Austro-Marxism, and the Psychology of Unemployment, 1919–1933

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The Unemployed of Marienthal (1933) has long been esteemed as a classic of twentieth-century social science; its portrait of the effects of joblessness on individual minds and social institutions has inspired generations of researchers. But this reception has largely overlooked the political origins and implications of the study. This essay resituates Marienthal in the context of its creation and dissemination: the distinctive Marxism of interwar Austria. Specifically, it demonstrates that Marienthal introduced social-psychological methods and findings into Marxist debates about the present state and future prospects of the working class. Led by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, the Marienthal researchers adopted the Austro-Marxist goal of creating a model proletariat through a program of “anticipatory socialism.” But by finding that unemployment confounded efforts to reform the working class, Marienthal undermined the very program it aimed to support. In fact, the essay shows, Marienthal authorized arguments that the unemployed were unreliable political actors—“declasse” workers as likely to become reactionaries as revolutionaries. The essay concludes by considering whether Marienthal embodied a distinctively Austro-Marxist “style” of thinking and research.

Introduction: The Prison without Bars

When unemployment caused by the Great Depression reached its apex in 1933, approximately twenty-five percent of Americans were without work. But in January of that year, The Nation introduced its American readers to a place where the crisis was almost unimaginably worse: the central Austrian village of Marienthal. According to Robert N. McMurry, the collapse of the Austrian textile industry had reduced Marienthal—a town centered around wool spinning and cloth dyeing—to a shadow of its former self. Marienthalers received unemployment relief and welfare payments, but this support maintained only the lowest level of subsistence. When the biweekly funds arrived, McMurry wrote, the village erupted in a kind of “macabre festival.” On these days Marienthalers purchased meat from the butcher; on other days they ate what they could find—it was a time “when men eat dogs.”

1For their comments and guidance on earlier drafts of this essay, I would like to thank Peter E. Gordon, Samuel Moyn, Elizabeth Lunbeck, Stuart Middleton, and the reviewers and editors of Modern Intellectual History.
3Ibid., 16.
Such lurid details aside, Marienthal interested McMurry for its demonstration of his view that unemployment “begets psychological as well as economic problems.” In his article, McMurry emphasized that jobless Marienthalers lost interest in the activities—reading newspapers, walking in the park, meeting in pubs, and attending political meetings—that had formerly held their interest. Although “literally drowned in time,” unemployed villagers suffered from torpor and boredom. Eventually, the jobless succumbed to despair and fatalism. McMurry conceded, “If Marienthal were a single instance in an otherwise prosperous country, its plight would be pitiable but not profoundly significant. But Marienthal is not an isolated case.” Already, McMurry warned, there were “literally thousands of Marienthals in Central Europe alone”—and more appeared with every economic setback. Worse still, he concluded, any place beset by endemic unemployment could become another Marienthal.

McMurry had not visited Marienthal. Nor had he read descriptions of the village in newspapers. Instead, his account of the Austrian hamlet followed from an innovative psychological study: The Unemployed of Marienthal: A Sociographical Investigation of the Effects of Long-Term Unemployment. “Much emphasis” in recent studies, McMurry complained, “has been placed on [unemployment’s] economic aspects; very little on its psychological effects.” But the authors of Marienthal—Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda, and Hans Zeisel—broke this pattern, completing what McMurry regarded as the “first comprehensive study of the effect of continued unemployment on the worker himself.” Through their innovative combination of social psychology and statistical analysis, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues discovered how unemployment constrained the human mind. By fomenting despair, creating desperation, and inducing resignation, it locked the unemployed in “a prison without bars.”

Absent from McMurry’s review of Marienthal was any recognition of the political context in which the study was produced, read, and debated. To be sure, McMurry likely did not know that the study’s researchers were active in the Austrian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (SDAP) and that Lazarsfeld, in particular, was the intellectual protégé of leading Austro-Marxist thinkers. Likewise, the extent to which Marienthal was entangled with the Marxist theory and socialist politics of interwar Austria was likely invisible to McMurry and his American readers. Subsequent generations of scholars have reinforced McMurry’s oversight: analyzing Marienthal as a methodological achievement of the social and human sciences, they

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4Ibid., 15.
5Ibid., 16.
6Ibid., 17.
7As has recently been argued, this conception of a “locality” as simultaneously “a particular geographical area” and a “universal plane” was a characteristic of the social sciences of interwar Central Europe. See Katherine Lebow, Małgorzata Mazurek, and Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Making Modern Social Science: The Global Imagination in East Central and Southeastern Europe after Versailles,” Contemporary European History 27/4 (2019), 137–42, at 138.
10Ibid., 17.
have depoliticized an eminently political project. This essay complicates such views by showing that Austro-Marxist theory shaped the distinctive methods and remarkable findings of Marienthal. Moreover, it demonstrates that Marienthal recursively acted upon the theory and politics of interwar Austro-Marxism.

The essay begins by demonstrating how social- and human-scientific research embodied the theories and implemented the aims of interwar socialists’ “politics of pedagogy”—their efforts to transform the existing working class into a revolutionary proletariat through social, cultural, and psychological reform. Although the essay seeks to describe a cohort of interwar researchers, it focuses on the figure of Paul Lazarsfeld. As historians of the Central European social sciences have shown, intellectual biography “can be a particularly useful tool for uncovering scientific histories against the grain” in “a region and a period marked by dramatic ruptures and discontinuities.” In its second section, the essay shows that Lazarsfeld came of intellectual age among the Austro-Marxists and became an active member of its social-scientific community. No passive participant, Lazarsfeld developed a research methodology—combining psychology and statistics—intended to extend the reach of socialist-aligned social science. At the heart of the essay is a reconstruction of Marienthal that traces the effects of Lazarsfeld’s method and argues that his statistical techniques reflected, reinforced, and amplified socialists’ views of the working class. Unemployment, Zeisel, Jahoda, and Lazarsfeld claimed, undid the politics of pedagogy by discouraging properly proletarian behavior, stripping away class consciousness, and muting political agency. In its fourth section, the essay contends that Marienthal acted upon the theoretical discourse and political calculus that shaped it by encouraging the SDAP’s growing suspicion that the unemployed were neither true proletarians nor reliable political actors. By way of conclusion, the essay briefly describes Lazarsfeld’s later recognition of—and suspicion about—the degree to which Austro-Marxism saturated Marienthal.

Making the “New People”

Long characterized as a singular fusion of Marxist theory and practice, Austro-Marxism emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and evolved rapidly in the years prior to the First World War. Leading Austro-Marxists maintained that industrialization had so thoroughly changed the nature and organization of productive forces that theorists and politicians must reexamine the key concepts of Marxist political economy and revolutionary action. Rudolf Hilferding, Karl


Renner, Otto Bauer, Max Adler, and their interlocutors did just that, combining elements of neo-Kantian ethics, logical-positivist epistemology, revisionist-Marxist economics, and personality psychology into a distinctive theoretical paradigm. Central to Austro-Marxism were the practices of “anticipatory socialism” through which the proletariat would create the conditions of possibility for the socialist future within the capitalist present. According to this view, education, acculturation, and socialization of the existing working class would create a disciplined proletariat conscious of the historical necessity and ethical obligation of its revolutionary task. Living as if they were not downtrodden workers exploited by capitalism but the agents of the universal class, this is to say, the proletariat could initiate the Austro-Marxists’ theorized “slow revolution.” Victor Adler identified the undertaking of a “revolution of minds [Gehirne]” as the socialist movement’s paramount task; Bauer went further by calling on his fellow socialists to attempt a “revolution of the soul.” But it was Max Adler who gave the program its most common name: the creation of “new people” (neue Menschen) fit for a socialist future.

Despite the decline of its theoretical fecundity in the wake of the First World War, Austro-Marxism persisted in and through the SDAP. As the dominant political power in “Red Vienna,” the SDAP initiated a wide-ranging program of cultural, social, and educational reform intended to transform workers into “new people.” Embedded within this program was the ambivalent view about the working class held by the SDAP leadership—often comprising bourgeois intellectuals, reformers, and politicians. Were workers, they asked, capable of fomenting revolution, or must they be directed by far-seeing guides? What role could bourgeois intellectuals play in the creation of working-class consciousness? As Lazarsfeld later described it, the SDAP sought to solve the riddle of fostering “real socialist feeling” in the working class.

Austro-Marxist theorists and SDAP reformers held that creating a proletarian culture required reaching workers in every aspect of their lives. To achieve this

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immersion, socialists created a web of overlapping activities, organizations, and publications; SDAP members could join socialist hiking clubs, read socialist magazines, and play on socialist sports teams.\textsuperscript{22} Many of these efforts intentionally disrupted working-class culture, self-expression, and society. Only by clearing backward attitudes and undisciplined behaviors, the SDAP held, could Austrian workers be remade as “new people.”\textsuperscript{23} For example, workers fortunate enough to obtain units in the new Gemeindebauten—the modern housing blocks built by the Viennese municipal government to house proletarians from tenements—were expected to embrace ideals, attitudes, and behaviors deemed properly proletarian: punctuality, sobriety, cleanliness, and orderliness.\textsuperscript{24} SDAP apparatchiks in the feared and loathed Wohnungsinspektorat enforced these norms with sharp reprimands, official sanctions, and veiled threats.\textsuperscript{25}

Nascent social and human sciences were central to the realization of anticipatory socialism. Although less pervasive than socialist organizations and less spectacular than the Gemeindebauten, these disciplines constituted technologies of transformation by which the SDAP sought to remake the proletariat.\textsuperscript{26} In the early 1920s, social-scientific studies of the working class began to take shape. Under what material conditions, researchers asked, did workers live? What were the effects of endemic poverty on physical health and mental well-being? How did workers feel about themselves, their families, and their compatriots? Emblematic of the wide scope and quantitative methods of this approach were the studies conducted by Käthe Leichter.\textsuperscript{27} Like other social-scientific projects from the period, the Austro-Marxist studies aimed to go beyond the collection and presentation of mere facts by charting the “spiritual development” (geistige Entwicklung) and grasping the “lifeworld” (Lebenswelt) of the working class.\textsuperscript{28} By the 1930s, a robust literature centering around questions of family life, childhood, sexuality, and education had emerged.\textsuperscript{29} Otto Rühle, Therese Schlesinger, Margarete Rada, Hildegard Hetzer, and Charlotte Bühler, among others, used the latest techniques from

\textsuperscript{22}In addition to the literature cited above see Dieter Langewiesche, Zur Freizeit des Arbeiters: Bildungsbestrebungen und Freizeitgestaltung österreichische Arbeiter im Kaisereich und in der ersten Republik (Stuttgart, 1980); Josef Weidenholzer, Auf dem Weg zum “neuen Menschen”: Bildungs- und Kulturarbeit der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie in der Ersten Republik (Vienna, 1981).
\textsuperscript{24}For an overview of this dynamic see Alfred Georg Frei, Rotes Wien: Austromarxismus und Arbeiterkultur: sozialdemokratische Wohnungs- und Kommunalpolitik, 1919–1934 (Berlin, 1984); Gruber, Red Vienna, 46–65.
\textsuperscript{25}For an overview of this dynamic see Alfred Georg Frei, Rotes Wien: Austromarxismus und Arbeiterkultur: sozialdemokratische Wohnungs- und Kommunalpolitik, 1919–1934 (Berlin, 1984); Gruber, Red Vienna, 46–65.
\textsuperscript{26}For an overview of this dynamic see Alfred Georg Frei, Rotes Wien: Austromarxismus und Arbeiterkultur: sozialdemokratische Wohnungs- und Kommunalpolitik, 1919–1934 (Berlin, 1984); Gruber, Red Vienna, 46–65.
\textsuperscript{27}See e.g. Käthe Leichter, Wie leben die Wiener Heimarbeiter? Eine Erhebung über die Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse von tausend Wiener Heimarbeitern (Vienna, 1923); Leichter, Mein Arbeitstag, mein Wochenende: 150 Berichte von Textilarbeiterinnen (Berlin, 1930); Leichter, So leben wir ... 1320 Industriearbeiterinnen berichten ihr Leben (Vienna, 1932).
\textsuperscript{28}See e.g. Otto Rühle, Die Seele des proletarischen Kindes (Vienna, 1925); Richard Woldt, Die Lebenswelt des Industriearbeiters (Leipzig, 1926).
\textsuperscript{29}An overview of this literature can be found in J. Robert Wegs, Growing Up Working Class: Continuity and Change among Viennese Youth, 1890–1938 (University Park, PA, 1989), chap. 6.
sociology, psychology, and social work to describe the grim conditions of a working-class upbringing: raised in miasmic slums by parents who were less affectionate than their bourgeois counterparts and swept up in the depraved culture of the “street,” young proletarians were malnourished, uneducated, oversexualized, and dissolute. Researchers aligned with the SDAP, this is to say, used social-scientific methods to measure and condemn the perceived gap between the current state of the working class and the promise of the “new people.”

Interwar socialists by no means invented such studies. As Zeisel explained in the methodological appendix to Marienthal, earlier generations of researchers had gathered data on physical attributes, family budgets, household inventories, and individual consumption not only to answer the “worker question” but also to gain a “complete overview” of society in its totality. Max Weber and his colleagues at the Verein für Sozialpolitik had turned social-scientific research into the worker question in a specific direction, asking, according to Zeisel, “What kind of individual does modern industry create by virtue of its particular structure and what kind of occupational (and hence, indirectly: non-occupational) fate does it offer him?”

Moreover, as other interwar socialists recognized, there existed a distinctively socialist tradition of enquêtes ouvrières initiated by Marx and intended to bring the workers to self-consciousness. In this vein, the researchers did not describe downtrodden workers in order to elicit sympathy but as a means of diagnosing the personal and social ills that must be rectified in the creation of the “new people.” What is more, these social scientists were near to and aligned with the political power needed to effectuate the changes for which they called.

The career of Charlotte Bühler aptly illustrates the intertwinement of social science and socialism. As a pioneering psychologist, Bühler was interested in the development of a coherent personality through the stages of life—from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. How, she asked, did biological needs, social expectations, and conscious desires combine to produce a foundation for intentional goals? At the beginning of her career in the early 1920s, Bühler researched this pattern using evidence gleaned from children’s diaries; later in the decade, she studied the personalities of some four hundred individuals preserved in biographies and memoirs. After spending 1926–7 in the United States, where she visited Edward Thorndike and Arnold Gesell, as a Rockefeller Foundation fellow, Bühler

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30Representative works of this literature include Therese Schlesinger-Eckstein, Wie will und wie soll das Proletariat seine Kinder erziehen? (Vienna, 1921); Charlotte Bühler, Das Seelenleben des Jugendlichen: Versuch einer Analyse und Theorie der psychischen Pubertät (Jena, 1929); Margarete Rada, Das reifende Proletariermädchen: Ein Beitrag zur Umweltforschung (Vienna, 1931); Hildegard Hetzer, Mütterlichkeit: Psychologische Untersuchung der Grundformen mütterlicher Haltung (Leipzig, 1937).


32Ibid., 109.


34Bühler presented her fully developed theory in Charlotte Bühler, Kindheit und Jugend: Genese des Bewusstseins (Leipzig, 1931).

35For Bühler’s analyses of diaries see Charlotte Bühler, Tagebuch eines jungen Mädchens (Jena, 1922); Rosemarie Buhlmann and Charlotte Bühler, Zwei Knabentagebücher: Mit einer Einleitung über die Bedeutung des Tagebuchs für die Jugendpsychologie (Jena, 1925); Charlotte Bühler, Zwei
began integrating experimental testing and empirical observation into her research. Data furnished by these methods established benchmarks of purportedly normal childhood development from birth through adolescence. Upon her return to Vienna, Bühler began to gather such evidence through the Child Observation Center, a research institute that sought to establish scientific conditions for observation and measurement. As S. J. Beck, a visiting American psychologist, described it to his colleagues, children were kept in glass-and-tile cubicles that enabled specialists to observe them around the clock. During the three-week-long period of observation, Bühler and her colleagues used both Binet–Simon intelligence scales and custom-designed psychological tests to evaluate subjects’ deviation from the standards of normal development. “This is the newest thing I have yet seen in Vienna,” Beck wrote, “and for that matter in Europe.” In his view, the center was the “ultra of modernity.”

But the center was no apolitical enterprise. Rather, it was a powerful partner of the municipal government of Red Vienna, working in concert with the Public Health Office to enforce the SDAP’s politics of pedagogy. Its experimental subjects were not willing volunteers but wards of the state; they were children taken from working-class homes by social workers who observed extreme poverty, “endangered morals,” “delinquency,” or “parental conflict.” If tests showed that a child was significantly behind the normal stage of development, Bühler could petition for her relocation to foster care or a correctional institution. Although Beck insisted that Bühler and her team recorded “[o]nly objective phenomena,” those affected by this system described an altogether different set of criteria—one centered on the norms, attitudes, and habits that the SDAP sought to cultivate in the working class. As one Viennese mother recalled, a social worker alternated between threatening and patronizing her:

Now you listen to me! I’ll have to take your child away if you carry on living in a pigsty and if your husband doesn’t get out and work. Do we understand each other? If, on the other hand, you can keep your flat clean, I see no reason why I...
should take your child into community care. If you keep that in mind, you’ll be able to keep your child.43

Bühler’s center was among the most effective means of policing proletarian behavior in Red Vienna: between June 1925 and December 1927 alone, it removed nearly seven thousand children from their families.44 The strength of the connection between research, politics, and reform was obvious—even to a foreigner like Beck. As Beck described it, “all waters of psychological search and research [at the center] ultimately flow back to the Gemeinde.”45

Bühler was aided by a cadre of graduate students and research assistants. Indeed, former members of the center later recalled that Bühler effectively forced her interests and approaches on the doctoral students overseen by her husband, Karl, and the postdoctoral researchers of his Vienna Psychological Institute. Members of this cohort—including Else Frenkel, Hildegard Hetzer, Margarete Rada, and Lotte Danziger—used evidence gathered in the center as the foundation for their own studies of working-class life.46 Doing so further strengthened the intellectual–political connection between Bühler’s psychological research program and the Austro-Marxists’ politics of pedagogy. But one of these assistants—Paul Lazarsfeld—went further. After joining the intellectual circle around Bühler in the mid-1920s and rising to prominence within it by the end of the decade, Lazarsfeld began to rebuild the foundations and transform the methods of her research program. To describe Lazarsfeld’s methodological intervention and to explain its application in Marienthal, it is necessary to retrace the path—from socialist to social scientist—that led him to Bühler.

Socialist and Social Scientist

Lazarsfeld’s immersion in the theoretical debates of Austro-Marxism and the political activities of the SDAP began early. In 1915, when Lazarsfeld was fourteen years old, his parents became active members of the Austrian party; soon thereafter, the Lazarsfelds’ home became something of a “socialist salon” to which Bauer, Hilferding, Victor Adler, and Friedrich Adler paid regular visits.47 These visits left an indelible impression on Lazarsfeld, endowing him with an ethical and emotional commitment to socialism. As he later recalled,

I see myself with a schoolmate. I would have been 16, not 17. I see myself with this friend at the window of a room in my parents’ house, and there is a

43 quoted in ibid.
beggarwoman on the street. I turned to my friend and said, “If it would help to bring Socialism so that there wouldn’t be such beggars, I would gladly jump out of the window and be dead.”

In 1915, Lazarsfeld joined the youth wing of the SDAP. For the next eight years, Lazarsfeld participated enthusiastically in activities for young comrades—leading a troop of Red Falcons, editing a socialist newsletter, and organizing charity drives for soldiers returning from the First World War. As Marie Jahoda, Lazarsfeld’s colleague and first wife, recalled, “In spite of Austria’s extreme economic misery at that time, the atmosphere was invigorating. Everything was new. The decadent Hapsburgs had been blown away; the republic was new; socialists in government were new; and Paul, like other young people, had actively participated in the revolutionary activities at the end of the war. He was full of creative energy.”

But Lazarsfeld was no ordinary Red Falcon. Because of his family’s involvement with Austro-Marxist ideologues and SDAP politicians, Lazarsfeld developed an incomparable connection to the movement—a connection embodied in his friendship with Friedrich Adler. In 1917, when Adler was convicted of the assassination of Minister-President Count Karl von Stürgkh, Lazarsfeld was arrested for disrupting the courtroom proceedings. Lazarsfeld paid Adler regular visits during his imprisonment, using the opportunities to smuggle pages from his new monograph to the outside world. After Adler was freed in 1919, Lazarsfeld even arranged a clandestine meeting between him and the hardline communist Kurt Eisler. According to Lazarsfeld, his connection with Adler was so deep that when his mentor, appointed secretary-general of the Labor and Socialist International in 1923, declined to hire Lazarsfeld as his secretary, the young man quit politics.

Lazarsfeld’s close personal relationships with Austria’s leading socialists provided more than opportunities for picaresque adventures. In 1916, when Lazarsfeld’s mother left her son in Hilferding’s care for an entire summer, the two took long hikes, during which they discussed socialist theory and politics. Max Winter, whom Lazarsfeld remembered as “the Emile Zola of Austrian socialism,” took Lazarsfeld along to a conference in Marseilles; instead of attending meetings, the two wandered the city, observing the conditions of the French lumpenproletariat. Such interactions—amounting to a kind of apprenticeship—transformed Lazarsfeld’s socialist commitments from affective to intellectual. This shift appeared, for example, in Lazarsfeld’s use of his Red Falcon cell to distribute questionnaires among the working class. It prompted Lazarsfeld’s insight that SDAP propagandists should not mine these surveys for sordid details of

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49 Ibid., 239–40, 249.
50 Ibid., 53.
53 Ibid., 199–200.
54 Ibid., 185.
55 Ibid., 211, 249.
proletarian life but analyze the responses quantitatively to gain an overview of the working class.\(^{56}\) Across his activities for the SDAP—from teaching courses at a labor college to meeting with proletarian artists—Lazarsfeld awakened to “the theme of connections between various sectors of society, which is now the first undergraduate lecture at college. But it was then so new and fascinating.”\(^{57}\)

Concurrent with Lazarsfeld’s immersion in socialism was his exposure to psychology. Alfred Adler, the pioneering theoretician and clinician, was young Lazarsfeld’s pediatrician.\(^{58}\) Even as she became involved with the SDAP, Lazarsfeld’s mother, Sofie, began training in analysis with Adler, becoming a practitioner in the mid-1920s. Marxist intellectuals across interwar Europe believed psychology to be the key to socialist revolution.\(^{59}\) Austro-Marxists, in particular, saw Adler’s theory of drive subordination as central to the task of creating “new people” out of the existing working class. Lazarsfeld shared this view: as an up-and-coming socialist intellectual, he argued that Marx’s critique of capitalism and Adler’s critique of neurosis presupposed and complemented one another.\(^{60}\) By so arguing, Lazarsfeld echoed the position of another family friend: Siegfried Bernfeld. Like Otto Fenichel, Erich Fromm, and Wilhelm Reich, Bernfeld maintained that Marx and Freud were linked by an “inner affinity” following from their mutual use of the dialectic to develop “materialist” accounts of individual life and social organization.\(^{61}\) Lazarsfeld was no Freudian, but he concurred, claiming that psychology would provide the means “to develop Socialist [sic] personalities … instead of individualistic personalities.”\(^{62}\)

Sometime around 1925, Lazarsfeld began attending the research seminar convened by Karl and Charlotte Bühler at the Viennese Psychological Institute. Much to Adler’s disappointment, Lazarsfeld readily adopted the Bühlers’ behaviorist paradigm. Further, Lazarsfeld saw in the Bühlers’ research program an opportunity to apply the mathematical skills he had developed as an undergraduate and graduate student. At Charlotte Bühler’s request, Lazarsfeld delivered a presentation on the potential contribution of statistics in psychological research. Apparently impressed with Lazarsfeld and his work, Bühler hired him to teach statistical techniques to graduate students and researchers at the institute.\(^{63}\) In 1927,

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\(^{63}\)Ibid., 50–51, 219–20; Lazarsfeld, 1975 Oral History, 44.
Karl Bühler helped Lazarsfeld establish the Austrian Economic Psychology Research Center (Österreichische wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungsstelle—ÖWF), an institute that would apply cutting-edge techniques to projects for private clients.\textsuperscript{64} By the early 1930s, Lazarsfeld had become an active member of Charlotte Bühler’s team of researchers, serving, for example, as the “statistical consultant” in studies conducted in the Child Observation Center.\textsuperscript{65} In 1931 Lazarsfeld oversaw publication of a volume, \textit{Youth and Employment}, collecting multiple studies in this genre from leading Central European authorities.\textsuperscript{66}

Lazarsfeld did not accept this approach uncritically. Instead, across a series of methodological and technical writings from the late 1920s and early 1930s, Lazarsfeld argued that social research must go beyond the presentation of aggregates, averages, and rates to analyze findings statistically and interpret them probabilistically. Why did Lazarsfeld believe the introduction of probabilistic statistics to the discipline to be necessary? In \textit{Statistical Practicum} (1929), a workbook written to accompany university-level instruction in statistical methods, Lazarsfeld couched the importance of these techniques in eminently practical terms. First, these methods were already in extensive use—both within and beyond the social and human sciences—but they were little understood in the psychological field.\textsuperscript{67} Worried that the uninformed use of statistics could lead to grave misinterpretations, Lazarsfeld intended to teach his readers the methods in their “pure” form. Once mastered, he assured his readers, techniques such as the calculation of standard deviation would enable them to correct errors and expedite the research process.\textsuperscript{68} But, as \textit{Statistical Practicum} progressed to more complex theories and more difficult exercises, Lazarsfeld developed a complementary—but more radical—argument for the importance of these techniques to psychological research. Probabilistic statistics, he claimed, would enable researchers to go beyond their predecessors by apperceiving mental states and making predictive statements.\textsuperscript{69} Otherwise put, Lazarsfeld promised that the methods he taught would revolutionize socialist-aligned research.

Lazarsfeld spent much of \textit{Statistical Practicum} introducing the Gauss curve—the normal or binomial distribution—that was integral to the statistical standardization and probabilistic interpretation of data. Although knowledge about and use of the normal distribution was widespread in Western and Central Europe, Lazarsfeld proceeded as if his readers had no knowledge of its origins, attributes, and implications. In its first sections, \textit{Statistical Practicum} underscored the practical function of the normal distribution. Comparing observed data with the normal distribution, for example, would enable researchers to identify outlying cases, assess categorization errors, and standardize scales.\textsuperscript{70} More conceptually, approaching evidence through

\textsuperscript{64}There is some discrepancy about the date of the ÖWF’s founding stemming from divergent recollections of the organization’s members; I concur with Mitchell Ash in placing the date in 1927. See Ash, “Entwicklung des Instituts 1922–1938,” 314–15.

\textsuperscript{65}See Bühler and Hetzer, \textit{Kleinkindertests}, unpaginated front matter.

\textsuperscript{66}Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Charlotte Bühler, \textit{Jugend und Beruf: Kritik und Material} (Jena, 1931).

\textsuperscript{67}Paul F. Lazarsfeld, \textit{Statistisches Praktikum für Psychologen und Lehrer} (Jena, 1929), iii–iv.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., iv.


\textsuperscript{70}Lazarsfeld, \textit{Statistisches Praktikum}, 26–43.
the framework of the Gauss Curve would enable researchers to see the correlative relationship between variables.  

But Lazarsfeld’s emphasis on the normal distribution was not entirely utilitarian. Indeed, Lazarsfeld held that statistical methods would initiate far-reaching changes in the research process and its political applications. To make this argument, Lazarsfeld turned to Adolphe Quetelet, the nineteenth-century polymath whose studies of regularity and deviation made him, in Lazarsfeld’s view, the direct, if unrecognized, predecessor to modern social science. As Lazarsfeld explained, Quetelet had been the first to observe the regularity of physical attributes within a population and to demonstrate that this pattern approximated the normal distribution. Especially important to Lazarsfeld was Quetelet’s evolution from “social physics” to “moral statistics”—his extension of the study of statistical regularities from physical to psychical attributes. Quetelet held that, like their physical counterparts, moral traits and mental characteristics would accord with the normal distribution and, further, that variation from this norm could be calculated probabilistically. Lazarsfeld later acknowledged that Quetelet had not reached this goal but insisted that his failure was not conceptual but empirical: Quetelet was unable to obtain enough data with which to calculate these regularities. Quetelet, Lazarsfeld insisted in Statistical Practicum, had set researchers on the “path to lawfulness [Gesetzmäßigkeit]”—a path that Lazarsfeld intended to follow to its end.

Lazarsfeld devoted an entire chapter of Statistical Practicum to modern moral statistics. According to Lazarsfeld, contemporary psychological researchers like the psychometricians L. L. Thurstone and Edward Thorndike provided the evidence necessary to validate Quetelet’s method. As part of the overall growth in intelligence testing in the wake of the First World War, these American researchers had created tests that generated quantitative data on memory, acuity, and attention. Lazarsfeld believed that such data would enable Quetelet’s successors—namely himself—to apply and thereby validate the methods of moral statistics. But psychometry did not provide a foolproof solution. As the discipline’s leading voices readily acknowledged, “Just what they [the tests] measure is not known; how far it is proper to add, subtract, multiply, divide, and compute ratios with the measures obtained is not known; just what the measures obtained signify concerning intellect is unknown.” Quantitative results might show that Subject A scored higher on a test than Subject B, but what did this difference—and its

71Ibid., chaps. 5–6.
72Ibid., 43.
75Lazarsfeld, Statistisches Praktikum, 43.
76Ibid., chap. 4.
margin—signify? As Thorndike wrote in 1927, psychometric tests suffered from “ambiguity in content, arbitrariness in units, and ambiguity in significance.”

As Lazarsfeld argued in *Statistical Practicum* and articles published in specialist journals, Quetelet’s statistical methods would provide a solution to this seemingly intractable problem. In *Statistical Practicum*, he showed that calculating the standard deviation within the psychometrical data would create series of intervals that were, in and of themselves, meaningful—even if their exact nature was not known. This is to say that, were the margin separating the scores of Subjects A and B on a test of memory greater than one standard deviation, Subject A could correctly be described as having a distinctly better memory than Subject B, despite the fact that no unit—in the vein of milliliters or degrees—existed for measurements of memory. Lazarsfeld informed his readers that, whether focused on intelligence or opinion, this procedure “leads [the researcher] directly to a superior metric through the implementation of the normal distribution of psychical phenomena.”

According to Lazarsfeld, this statistical technique fulfilled and modernized Quetelet’s program of moral statistics. Further, the method would allow researchers “to capture the expressions of individuals (in the broadest sense) immediately.” This unmediated access to psychical states, in turn, would enable researchers to make informed generalizations. Lazarsfeld explained that Quetelet had understood these generalizations as the discovery of the “average man” and the “types” arrayed around him. Conversely, knowledge of these types would allow the researcher to work backwards—using understandings of the whole to develop insight into its parts. In Lazarsfeld’s view, the statistical method pointed beyond itself, laying the foundation for “a future analysis of the phenomenon [under investigation] that will not be statistical but unique [individuelle].” Although Lazarsfeld did not develop these positions through forthright argument, readers of *Statistical Practicum* might well have been convinced that moral statistics and psychometrics combined in a virtuous circle of statistical-psychological research.

For Lazarsfeld to position himself as Quetelet’s true successor was audacious. Since their publication, Quetelet’s writings had aroused the suspicion of German thinkers worried by the challenge that their account of statistical regularity posed to human autonomy, cultural diversity, and historical specificity. Later generations of statisticians sought to rehabilitate Quetelet’s techniques by framing them as methods suited to populations and processes but not applicable to single events or individuals. Concomitantly, these researchers categorically disallowed the use of

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79Lazarsfeld, “Die Bedeutung der normalen Verteilungskurve.”
81Ibid., 51, emphasis original.
82Ibid., 47.
83Ibid., 52.
statistics to infer psychological states and predict specific outcomes. Lazarsfeld did not argue against any interpreters of Quetelet—he ignored them entirely. Bypassing past and contemporary scholarship on Quetelet, Lazarsfeld presented moral statistics as unproblematically applicable to individuals and able to make causal claims.

But *Statistical Practicum* was no work of methodology. Rather, it was also an eminently practical text, replete with explanations and exercises intended to lead novice students from basic calculations of averages to complex determinations of standard deviations. Every researcher could accomplish Lazarsfeld’s proposed reconciliation of psychometrical data and moral-statistical analysis, thereby gaining the ability to observe, measure, and typologize mental states. Moreover, researchers could deploy Quetelet’s methods to apply these generalizations to particular cases and to make valid claims about their potential causes. Lazarsfeld himself used these methods in the text that became synonymous with his early career: *The Unemployed of Marienthal*. Through this application, Lazarsfeld showed that his statistical-psychological methods served his fellow Marxists’ theory and practice of reforming the existing proletariat into the “new people” of the socialist future.

**Psychological Breakdown**

In the late 1920s, Lazarsfeld began searching for a project in which to apply his methods of empirical research and statistical analysis. Lazarsfeld and his closest collaborators at the ÖWF—Hans Zeisel and Marie Jahoda—approached Otto Bauer in 1930, asking for funds to study how workers spent their free time. After Bauer reproached Lazarsfeld for his obtuse neglect of the effects of the Great Depression on Austrian workers, the ÖWF proposed a different subject: “a community [Gemeinschaft] that was unemployed in its totality.” Bauer approved the project. In November 1931, fifteen researchers arrived in the village of Marienthal; by May 1932, they had concluded their fieldwork. A year later, in 1933, the ÖWF published *The Unemployed of Marienthal* to acclaim in both the academic and political press. In an era when the proper metric of unemployment was hotly contested, *Marienthal* supplied both precise analysis and striking conclusions.

The village of Marienthal was an ideal candidate for the ÖWF’s study. At the height of the Great Depression, approximately eighty percent of Marienthalers were unemployed. The ÖWF attributed this staggering figure to the fact that

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the village centered around a textile factory as “other communities developed around a market, a church, or a castle.” The factory’s final closure, in 1930, left no Marienthaler untouched. The wealthy left Marienthal early; those who remained relied on the government for subsistence. These villagers were desperately poor: 45 percent ate only bread and coffee for their evening meals; 54 percent ate meat only once per week.

In 1933, the ÖWF described its aim as the integration of these “smallest details of daily life” into a “framework for the whole” experience of unemployment. To do so, the researchers turned to the discipline of sociography (Sozigraphie): a combination of sociology, geography, anthropology, racial science, and political economy into, as the field’s founder S. R. Steinmetz put it, a “history of becoming” that “describes the being of all peoples according to the course of their lives.” At the time research for Marienthal was being planned and undertaken, leading German sociologists like Ferdinand Tönnies and Otto Jahn were hotly debating the use of statistics in sociography. Lazarsfeld, Zeisel, and Jahoda signaled their intention to join this debate. In a memorandum used to brief its field researchers, the ÖWF described its research into unemployment as inextricably bound to its development of the sociographic method. Its goals were:

1) To characterize the phenomenon of unemployment as precisely as possible, whether from the individual or collective perspective.

2) If possible, to reveal the effects of unemployment by comparison with earlier times and other places or by dividing it [unemployment] into phases.

3) To concentrate all the available resources of social psychology on a collective in order to determine the extent to which a sociography is possible today.

As a methodological appendix to Marienthal made clear, the ÖWF believed that its text provided a conclusive, affirmative answer to its contemporaries’ questions about the role of statistics in sociography. According to the ÖWF, the study showed how the methods Lazarsfeld had described in Statistical Practicum could be used to synthesize individual observations and measurements into a comprehensive view of the integral whole.

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92Ibid., 11.
93Ibid., 16–17.
94Ibid., 1–3.
97ÖWF, “Anweisung für Marienthal,” n.d., 2, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld Papers Series I (PFL Papers I), Box 34, Folder 17, Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. The shift from “A” to “2” is original to the text.
The ÖWF identified a number of sources that might yield such information and a variety of approaches for obtaining it. They plumbed governmental records, interviewed local leaders, and calculated household budgets. Quantitative and qualitative evidence came from diverse sources: lists of books borrowed from libraries, reports of daily routines, and observations of movements of the villagers through public spaces. Although they seem not to have recognized it, the ÖWF researchers emulated their Central European and American counterparts by using letters, diaries, writings, and, especially, autobiographies as evidence of the subjective experience of unemployment.

Charlotte Bühler exerted the most significant and consistent influence over the ÖWF. Like Bühler, the ÖWF researchers obtained crucial evidence through interviews—often disguised—with Marienthalers. Interviewers were required to understand the purpose of the study and to familiarize themselves with the questions prior to going into the field in order to appear natural and relaxed when engaging with subjects. Interviews served a trifold purpose. First, the ÖWF used them to gather answers to specific questions about the size, composition, history, and condition of village families. Second, the researchers hoped that these questions would initiate unstructured conversations in which the subjects inadvertently revealed important psychological evidence—information about their experiences, attitudes, and reasoning. Third, following the procedures Bühler developed at the Child Observation Center, the ÖWF utilized interviews to make discrete observations about the physical presentation, material condition, and psychological disposition of its subjects. Given its institutional and interpersonal ties to Bühler’s Center, the ÖWF’s emulation of her methods was hardly unexpected.

One context in which these interviews were conducted—a charity providing used clothing to the poorest villagers—warrants particular attention. Overseen by Lotte Danziger, a former assistant to Bühler, the charity project used relief efforts as a pretext to interview and observe the unemployed. Danziger and her associates visited Marienthalers’ homes, ostensibly to ask what clothes the family needed most. Like the social workers attached to the Child Observation Center, however, the ÖWF researchers used these visits to assess the material condition.

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99For the ÖWF’s implicit comparison of its own approach to these older methods see Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 89–123.
100Marienthalers recorded how they passed their days on timesheets prepared and distributed by the researchers. See ÖWF, “Freizeit-Erhebung. Fragebogen der Österreichischen Wirtschaftspsychologischen Forschungsstelle,” n.d., PFL Papers I, Box 34, Folder 16. For a description of the ÖWF’s observations of Marienthalers’ movements see Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 59–61.
102ÖWF, “Instruktion,” n.d., 1–2, PFL Papers I, Box 34, Folder 17.
103Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 30–31.
105For a description of the charity see Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 5–6.
and psychical state of their subjects. Excerpts from Danziger’s reports in *The Unemployed of Marienthal* reveal this objective:

The apartment gave an extremely neat and tidy impression; the children’s and wife’s clothing were meticulously clean. The husband had, to be sure, a completely ripped shirt and entirely patched pants. In making the inventory we were informed that this was all that he owned … The husband told us that things had been going very poorly over the last several days. They had only been able to buy bread and only an insufficient amount. But the children came in every few minutes to ask for more; they had not had enough. The wife sat in the kitchen and cried.106

Danziger and her ÖWF colleagues considered such observations to be neutral social-scientific data. But, just as Bühler and her colleagues had done in their center, Danziger and the ÖWF used this evidence to assess working-class families in order to advance the project of creating “new people.”

Other evidence uncovered in the fieldwork likely amplified socialists’ suspicions about the proletariat. The ÖWF’s analysis showed, for instance, that participation in social organizations, arts activities, and political parties declined as a function of long-term unemployment.107 While the researchers recognized that many Marienthalers were unable to pay the membership fees and party dues that such activities required, they also argued that this situation signaled a more general retreat from public life and social activity. Marienthal was a “weary community.”108 Despite the reduction of subscription prices, circulation of the SDAP newspaper, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, declined some 60 percent between 1927 and 1930; borrowing from the workingmen’s library dropped by nearly half between 1929 and 1930.109 SDAP politicians and apparatchiks were doubtless troubled by such findings, for the creation of “new people” depended on workers’ continual immersion in socialist ideas, culture, and activities. Dirty and downtrodden, these unemployed workers were far from the disciplined proletariat that Austro-Marxist theorists and SDAP reformers had sought to create through the program of anticipatory socialism.

The ÖWF spent six months in 1932 “working through” the material—totaling more than thirty kilograms of paper—generated by the fieldwork.110 First, the lead researchers gathered at the Bühlers’ institute to collaboratively reconstruct evidence from often incomplete field notes and to categorize the resulting material.111 Second, assistants standardized, normalized, and tabulated data, combining metrics about family size, income, and consumption into a single, multidimensional index: income per consumption unit per day.112 Following the procedure outlined in

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106Ibid., 78.
107Ibid., 8 n. 1.
108Ibid., chap. 5.
109Ibid., 34–6.
110Ibid., 8.
Statistical Practicum, they located each household on a continuum of consumption per unit per day and established a typology, classifying families’ material status as minimal, average, or maximal according to their distance from the mean. Third, Lazarsfeld transformed these “statistical types” — as he termed them in 1936 — into “interpretive types,” thereby fulfilling the promise of Quetelet’s method. To do so, his colleagues later recalled, Lazarsfeld created “conceptual formulations from a mass of concrete details” by distilling the multifarious experience of unemployment to its “central components.”

This process of codification, quantification, analysis, and interpretation yielded three distinct types of unemployed Marienthalers: the “unbroken,” the “broken,” and the “resigned.” Unbroken Marienthalers were, in the ÖWF’s view, on par with those villagers lucky enough to be employed: they participated in the economic, social, and political life of the village; they applied for new jobs, attended political party meetings, and, most important, retained hope for the future. By contrast, broken villagers no longer maintained their homes, themselves, or their faith in the future; they lost all sense of time and failed to plan for the next weeks, months, or years. As Lazarsfeld described them, broken Marienthalers suffered from a reduced “horizon of experience.” On the surface, resigned villagers resembled their unbroken counterparts, maintaining their homes and appearances and sending their children to school. Indeed, they seemed to exhibit a feeling of “equanimity” (Gelassenheit). But this superficial attitude masked a pernicious dynamic: for the resigned, “expectations from life are continually further reduced; the circle of events and institutions in which they still participate continually shrinks; the energy [Energie] that remains is concentrated on the maintenance of an ever-smaller sphere of life [Lebensraum].” The resigned did not appear to be as desperate as the broken — but only because their experiential horizons had not collapsed entirely.

Much like Danziger’s observations of Marienthalers, Lazarsfeld’s typology of the unemployed recast the categories of the SDAP’s new-people program as criteria of the ÖWF’s social-scientific research. Like Bühler and her associates, the ÖWF researchers put social psychology in the service of anticipatory socialism. Although Marienthal followed this established pattern, it did not perform the same function: instead of bolstering the SDAP’s efforts to reform the working class, Marienthal showed its failure to create the model proletariat. Through

113 Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 16–22.
116 Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 47–8.  
117 Ibid., 48; cf. Wegs, Growing Up Working Class, 52.  
118 Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 48; cf. Karl Bühler, Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache (Jena, 1934), 16.  
119 Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 43.  
120 Ibid., 78.
Lazarsfeld’s conceptual work, Danziger’s claims that the unemployed regressed from the model of the “new people” rose to the level of social-scientific arguments. 

Marienthal’s concept of resignation embodied the pessimism of the text and its authors. Using statistical techniques developed by Quetelet and refined by Lazarsfeld, the ÖWF found that, as unemployment persisted, the resigned “gradually lost their tradition of occupation and work” and came to think of unemployment as their “calling” (Beruf).\textsuperscript{121} Eventually, the resigned no longer felt themselves to be out-of-work proletarians but to be members of a new and distinct economic class—no longer unemployed workers but the unemployed.\textsuperscript{122} One of the most-cited subjects in Marienthal, Man 467, illustrated this slide into resignation: in the first year of his unemployment he sent out 130 applications for work; by the time Danziger interviewed him, in 1932, he had become “entirely despairing.” Man 467 was convinced, “It will never get better, only worse.’ He wishes that it would all fall down.”\textsuperscript{123} Resignation replaced the solidaristic class consciousness that the SDAP had sought to create with a shallow sense of apolitical “common destiny” (Schicksalsverbundenheit). But unemployment would ultimately dissolve even this sense of fellow feeling, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues argued. Pushing bourgeois individualism to its logical conclusion, unemployment would atomize individuals—inducing every Marienthaler to “undertake his own rescue” at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{124} Such a sudden shock might induce some jobless workers to turn to suicide.\textsuperscript{125} More broadly, the ÖWF speculated that unemployment would lead to mass migration and political revolution.\textsuperscript{126}

More than merely ideological, the ÖWF’s pessimism about the fate of the unemployed originated in a material analysis of economic conditions and standards of living in Marienthal. Combining moral-statistical techniques developed by Quetelet with social-scientific approaches used by Frédéric Le Play and Ernst Engel, the ÖWF claimed to show that unemployed workers measuring lower on the income-consumption index were more likely to be broken or resigned than workers with higher rates of consumption. Individuals forced by poverty to drink ersatz coffee and scrounge cigarette butts in the street, for example, were more likely to be broken than unbroken.\textsuperscript{127} Relying on Quetelet’s methodology as Lazarsfeld had developed it in Statistical Practicum, the ÖWF claimed that this relationship was actually causal. According to this argument, a worker habituated to buying pork from the butcher reduced to hunting cats would likely descend from an unbroken to a broken psychological state.\textsuperscript{128} Further, the ÖWF relied on the predictive powers and granular focus that Lazarsfeld found in Quetelet’s statistics to identify the specific points at which Marienthalers would pass from one mental

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., 48–9.
\textsuperscript{122}Desrosières has termed this conceptualization of supra-individual, social phenomena, which he attributes to Quetelet, the creation of “macrosocial objects.” Desrosières, The Politics of Large Numbers, 68, 71–81.
\textsuperscript{123}Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 46.
\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., 84, 87.
\textsuperscript{126}Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., 72–3.
\textsuperscript{128}Ibid., 22–4, 82.
state to another. As few as five Austrian schillings per month meant the difference between a family’s ability to purchase real or ersatz products—between, that is, its members being unbroken or broken. 129

Lazarsfeld’s interpretation of Quetelet subtended the dire prognosis of *Marienthal*: as unemployment benefits and governmental relief declined over time, more and more villagers would inevitably slide down the “stages of a psychical breakdown [*Hinabgleiten*].” 130 At the time of its research in the village, the ÖWF calculated that 23 percent of Marienthalers were unbroken, 69 percent were resigned, and 8 percent were broken. 131 Although the unemployed might remain unbroken for some months, they would inevitably break under the strain of privation; the horizon that limned the possibilities of their lives would shrink until it vanished. 132

Capitalist Crises and Socialist Dilemmas

Lazarsfeld and his colleagues developed a powerful indictment of capitalism. Unemployment, they showed, caused physical, mental, and even, as one reviewer noted, spiritual privations. 133 Declining material conditions muted experience, eroded individuality, and undercut class consciousness. “Every less schilling of support,” the reviewer of *Marienthal* for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* exclaimed, “would inevitably mean further descent into apathy!” 134 What solutions did the ÖWF propose? At first blush, the researchers seem to have demurred. A substantive analysis of unemployment “in all its meanings and complexities,” they wrote in *Marienthal*, must await “calmer times” after the crisis. 135 “The only real source of help,” in the present, “would be, naturally, to return [the unemployed] to work.” 136 Closer examination shows, however, that these statements formed distinctive contributions to theoretical and political debates about persistent, endemic unemployment in the working class.

Unemployment—as a concept and condition—had long attracted the attention of Marxists. Half a century before *Marienthal*, Marx and Engels theorized that the “reserve army of labor” much in evidence could be traced to the falling-rate-of-profit tendency in capitalism: as profit-seeking capitalists sought to increase returns by lowering costs, they replaced human labor with machine production—a dynamic that generated a continually increasing group of permanently unemployed, immiserated workers. 137 Marxists sometimes argued that the

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129 Ibid., 48, 73.
130 Ibid., 72.
131 Ibid., 47–50.
136 Ibid., 22.
unemployed had revolutionary potential; as both the number and poverty of jobless workers grew in proportion to capitalists’ profits, the working class would rise up to expropriate the expropriators.\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Marienthal} developed an altogether different argument. Across its empirical findings and interpretive conclusions, the ÖWF claimed that unemployment worked against the revolution by undoing the transformation of the working class into the “new people” of the socialist future. Without employment, they argued, workers became idle, disengaged, short-sighted, and selfish—in a word, resigned. Only by returning the jobless to work, Lazarsfeld and his ÖWF colleagues held, could their resignation be reversed. Employment within industrial capitalism, this is to say, was a precondition for the “slow revolution” to socialism.

By so arguing, the ÖWF joined an ongoing debate about the causes—and, especially, the consequences—of unemployment begun by Lazarsfeld’s fellow Austro-Marxists. In a two-part essay published in the movement’s theoretical journal, \textit{Der Kampf}, in 1933, Max Adler demonstrated that Austro-Marxists were deeply concerned with the effects of the unemployment crisis on class consciousness. Jobless workers, he argued, lacked the “energy of the class struggle” because they had not received the “Marxist workers’ education” that would have enabled them to see themselves as part of the proletariat.\textsuperscript{139} Organizing in the workplace, Adler held, enabled the laborer to become “a proud, self-aware, future-oriented man” able to proclaim to the bourgeoisie and capitalists, “Your world is not mine—the world of the future.”\textsuperscript{140} Adler, the theorist behind the new-people program, held that, no matter the level of acculturation and reform, the existing working class could not become the revolutionary proletariat without employment.

\textit{Marienthal} informed Adler’s claims, shaped his arguments, and validated his insights about unemployment. Evidence from the text convinced Adler that mass unemployment had created “quite a new type of proletariat” entirely unknown to Marx and his successors.\textsuperscript{141} Unlike earlier workers, who might be temporarily unemployed as a result of the boom–bust cycle, modern proletarians might never have experienced long-term employment. As a result, the Marxist education attained through the day-to-day class struggle was “quite alien” to them.\textsuperscript{142} Adler agreed with the ÖWF that unemployment put workers beyond the reach of the SDAP’s politics of pedagogy, worrying that “the effects of need and embitterment” would “destroy the psychological willingness to participate in such an education” at all.\textsuperscript{143} According to Adler, long-term unemployment would mark some workers with a “spiritual distinction” inimical to membership in the proletariat.\textsuperscript{144}

Even those who had received the all-important Marxist education were not immune. Building on the ÖWF’s demonstration that long periods without work

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\textsuperscript{140}Adler, “Wandlung [Part I],” 379.

\textsuperscript{141}Ibid., 407.

\textsuperscript{142}Ibid., 408.

\textsuperscript{143}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{144}Adler, “Wandlung [Part I],” 375, emphasis original.
\end{footnotesize}
induced Marienthalers to identify their occupation—and thus themselves—as “unemployed,” Adler argued that extended joblessness would cause proletarians to “lose the sense of belonging to the working class and see themselves as declassed.”\footnote{Adler, “Wandlung [Part II],” 409–10, emphasis original.} Echoing Marienthal, Adler described these declassed workers as “exhausted” and ascribed to them a feeling of “resignation.”\footnote{Ibid., 410.} As if generalizing from the ÖWF’s description of Man 467—who “wished it would all fall down”—Adler claimed that the unemployed developed a vengeful “desire to smash everything to pieces.”\footnote{Ibid., 411; cf. Jahoda, Zeisel, and Lazarsfeld, Marienthal, 46.}

But Adler went further than the ÖWF in speculating about the consequences of this desire. Adapting the conclusions of Marienthal to his political ends, he transformed the ÖWF’s determinist tendencies into an ineluctable pessimism about the future of the proletariat. While Lazarsfeld and his colleagues had argued that unemployment would culminate in atomized individualism, Adler drew a direct connection between the economic and political crises the SDAP faced. Absent the Marxist education necessary to carry out the class struggle, the unemployed, he argued, would lose faith in the socialist “slow revolution” and join the more confrontational communists. Those unpersuaded by communism were likely deep in depressed resignation—and apathy born of resignation, Adler claimed, would soon become the toleration of reaction.\footnote{Adler, “Wandlung [Part II],” 411.} Declased workers and fractured movements could not serve as the “dam” needed to hold back the fascist tide. Worse still were those workers who were so desperate they might change their allegiance entirely: unemployment, according to Adler, could become the most fertile “field of recruitment” for fascism.\footnote{Ibid., 410.} Such conclusions were remarkable not least because of the social-psychological methods Adler used to reach them: although created to further the progression of workers into “new people,” the ÖWF’s methodology ultimately served to document their regression—their descent into apathetic, declassed, atomized subjects who stood apart from the proletariat and outside the class struggle.

Questions about the nature and consequences of unemployment were more than theoretical. Indeed, they were rife with political implications for interwar Austrian socialists. Whom did the SDAP represent? For whom did it struggle? How far should it go to protect the unemployed? Party leaders and deputies debated such questions across the early 1930s. In October 1933—at what would be the SDAP’s last congress of the Austrian Republic—members of the SDAP executive and internal opposition forged a compromise platform, which included demands to reverse devastating cuts to unemployment benefits.\footnote{See the discussion in Rabinbach, Crisis of Austrian Socialism, 141–8.} But behind this agreement to protect the unemployed lurked an insidious divide. As Wilhelm Reich, an unorthodox psychoanalyst and socialist fellow traveler, later described it, the distance between the employed and the unemployed was palpable. As Reich recalled, the SDAP “laid claim to the leadership of society” in the name of the unemployed, but, “during their demonstrations ‘against hunger and the system,’” the
unemployed “felt like the outcasts they really were.”\footnote{151} Just as Adler feared, the unemployed ceased to identify with the SDAP. Reich recollected that, during May Day marches, he frequently heard the unemployed decry the “social fascists”—a characteristically communist denunciation of democratic socialists—before breaking into communist songs. According to Reich, the jobless shouted, “Give us our unemployment benefits” as they “shook their fists threateningly.”

Did \textit{Marienthal} encourage or shape this reciprocal mistrust between the unemployed and the SDAP? Any attempt to draw a direct connection would be tenuous. Yet Adler’s unqualified embrace of \textit{Marienthal} in his essays on unemployment suggests that the study resonated with Austro-Marxist intellectuals and SDAP ideologues. It did so through its presentation of empirical evidence of conditions among the unemployed, which preyed upon socialists’ conviction that the working class must be transformed—and their anxiety that the needed reform was not occurring. \textit{Marienthal} simultaneously embraced and amplified these concerns. According to the ÖWF, the regression of the unemployed from resiliency to resignation—with all the attendant psychological, social, and political consequences—was not an anxiety born of pessimism, but a conclusion reached through statistical, material, and psychological research. Otherwise put, Adler drew conclusions about the Austrian proletariat based on findings he took to be scientific.

Already in 1930, Adler had reminded his fellow members of the SDAP that Marxism was not \textit{Weltanschauung} but a “science of social regularity [\textit{sozialen Gesetzmäßigkeit}]” or, in a word, sociology.\footnote{152} In the same essay, however, Adler recognized that Marxism could be the “foundation of a worldview” and insisted that this fact did not diminish its status as a social science.\footnote{153} Lazarsfeld and his colleagues proved Adler correct: they embraced and extended a worldview based on Marxism in and through an Austro-Marxist social science.

\textbf{Conclusion: A Style of Thinking}

Adler was not the only Central European thinker concerned with the link between science and worldview. In 1935, Ludwik Fleck, the Polish biologist and philosopher of science, argued that scientific researchers were ineluctably bound to a “thought-style”—an epistemological framework buried so deep within and exerting such power over the mind that it determined which scientific problems were seen and which were overlooked.\footnote{154} This essay has argued that Austro-Marxism constituted just such a Fleckian style of thinking. Through its focus on Lazarsfeld, it illuminated the process by which Austro-Marxism impressed itself deeply on a cohort of researchers, shaping their conceptions of, research into, and conclusions about social phenomena and psychological states. Documenting Lazarsfeld’s revival of Quetelet’s statistical methodology, the essay has shown how the development of empirical methods and quantitative techniques might serve to extend and refine

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{151}Wilhelm Reich, \textit{People in Trouble} (New York, 1976), 94.
\bibitem{153}Ibid., 33–5.
\bibitem{154}Ludwik Fleck, \textit{Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache: Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv} (Basel, 1935).
\end{thebibliography}
the SDAP’s politics of pedagogy—a program based, in turn, on the Austro-Marxists’ theory of making “new people” from the existing proletariat. But the relationship between science and style was neither unidirectional nor static; social- and human-scientific research acted on the worldview that birthed it. Reconstructing Marienthal, the essay has demonstrated that Lazarsfeld’s methodology did not simply reflect Austro-Marxist concepts and SDAP policies—it amplified and elevated them. Through its social-scientific depiction of the unemployed, Marienthal framed Austro-Marxist debates about the prospects for class struggle in an era increasingly dominated by the specter of fascism.

What became of the Austro-Marxist style after the fall of the Austrian Republic in 1934? Many of the ÖWF researchers joined their Central and Western European counterparts in emigrating to the United States, where some—especially Lazarsfeld—found professional success. Did they retain their distinctive Austrian sensibility in New Deal and, later, Cold War America? Lazarsfeld often insisted that, after his arrival in the United States as a Rockefeller Foundation fellow, he had foresworn his earlier commitments and become a “Marxist on leave.” But some among Lazarsfeld’s colleagues—most notably Daniel Bell—remained unconvinced. During a 1961 interview with Lazarsfeld, Bell pressed his friend to reconsider his intellectual development and reassess its impact on his professional career. Upon reflection, Lazarsfeld conceded that Austro-Marxist intellectuals had impressed upon him the method of “making striking connections” between lived experience, economic forces, and historical developments in social research. Bell built on Lazarsfeld’s insight with obvious enthusiasm: Marxism, he suggested, “shows in your work. It’s a style, really, for you. The content is less important than the style—it’s the way you connect things and analyze them.” Like Fleck, Bell understood style as nothing less than “the way a man is trained to look at the world.”

Questions about Lazarsfeld’s adherence to the Austro-Marxist style of thinking into the 1960s lie beyond the scope of this essay. What is clear, however, is that Lazarsfeld remained enmeshed in this thought-style from the middle of the 1930s through the beginning of the 1950s. The Austro-Marxist-inspired and SDAP-aligned program he developed in texts such as Statistical Practicum and

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155 For Lazarsfeld’s characterization of his own experience of emigration as paradigmatic see Lazarsfeld, “An Episode in the History of Social Research.”


158 Ibid., 262.

159 Ibid., 265.

applied in works such as Marienthal persisted in his work despite his relocation to the United States. In his coauthored essay in Authority and the Family (1936), Lazarsfeld investigated the possibilities for social transformation created by the reconfiguration of authority in the nuclear families of the working class.161 Through his indirect contribution to The Unemployed Man and His Family (1940), Lazarsfeld asked how the psychological effects of material privation interacted with the social foundations of class consciousness to produce revolutionary sentiments and reactionary attitudes.162

Lazarsfeld not only raised such questions but also sought to answer them with the research techniques and empirical methods he had designed and applied in interwar Austria: evidence collected through indirect interviews, clandestine observations, official statistics, and questionnaires was aggregated, conceptualized, and interpreted. At the same time, Lazarsfeld did not merely repeat the same procedure he and his colleagues had applied in Marienthal. Rather, as early as 1934, Lazarsfeld began to question this approach. In a memorandum for his new colleagues at Columbia University he concluded that the concept of resignation had political resonances far beyond its scientific remit; it called new modes of experience into being and subjected them to social control.163 Across a number of research projects and methodological writings, Lazarsfeld began to raise methodological questions—about the relation between “statistical” and “interpretive” types, the process of “discerning” causality within and among phenomena, and the role of “concepts” in the research process—following from this reexamination of Marienthal.164 Such questioning suggests that Lazarsfeld may have come think that Marienthal was inextricably bound to the Austro-Marxist style of thinking. Lazarsfeld, this is to say, may have begun to see Marienthal as, in the words of one reviewer, a work of “spiritual research” central to the Austro-Marxists’ “revolution of the soul.”165

161Leichter and Lazarsfeld, “Erhebung bei Jugendlichen.”
162Mirra Komarovsky, The Unemployed Man and His Family: The Effect of Unemployment upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-Nine Families (New York, 1940), 116–33. Lazarsfeld directed this study, which began as Komarovsky’s doctoral dissertation, and introduced the published text.


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