

## Otto Leichter (February 22, 1897-February 14, 1973)

Otto Leichter dedicated his whole life to the interests of the working class, first as a newspaperman and later, in addition, as a historian of the Austrian labor movement and the contemporary American political scene. Born in Vienna, where he took a degree as doctor of law, he joined the staff of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the authoritative paper of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, in 1925. There he worked side by side with the leader of the party, Otto Bauer.

In 1934, after the suppression of the Austrian Social Democrats by the Dollfuß dictatorship, Leichter became one of the leaders of the socialist underground party. From trips abroad to Brno and Zürich on behalf of the outlawed labor movement he returned to Vienna, where he lived with his wife Käthe and his children until the Anschluß in 1938. Then, after various adventures or, rather, ordeals in France, he settled in the United States. He could not save Käthe, an outstanding member of the younger party leadership; she perished in the concentration camp of Ravensbrück.

Leichter kept faith with her memory, acting as a leading member of the Austrian Socialist Party in exile, later as United States correspondent of the revived *Arbeiter Zeitung* and as representative of the German Press Agency at the United Nations. He also spent a good deal of his time in his native Austria. He was stricken there with a heart attack while he attended a conference dealing with the stormy history of the Austrian republic from 1927 to 1938. Three months later, Leichter, whom neither sickness nor danger ever deterred from his chosen path, collapsed in a New York street as he was going to work. He is survived by his second wife Else, with whom he spent more than thirty years of a happy marriage, and by two sons active in American public life.

Among Leichter's many writings the following are of particular interest to the readers of the *Austrian History Yearbook*: "Der Versuch einer berufständischen Gewerkschaft. Der Gewerkschaftsbund der österreichischen Arbeiter und Angestellten 1934-1938," *Review of Social History* (1939), proves the automatic failure of a government imposed by authoritarian trade union policy. *Zwischen zwei Diktaturen. Österreichs revolutionäre Sozialisten 1934-1938* (1968) is one of the authoritative histories dealing with the outlawed party organization. *Glanz und Elend der ersten Republik. Wie es zum österreichischen Bürgerkrieg kam* (1964) moves farther back than either of the two

aforementioned works but in its conclusions also comes closer to the problems of the future. All three of these studies reveal a rare combination of keen observation and mature reflection that is all the more remarkable since Leichter was passionately involved in the topics of his research. The crowning, main work of Leichter, however, is perhaps his *Otto Bauer. Tragödie oder Triumph?* (1970). In this book, which is not, strictly speaking, a biography but a study of Bauer's place in the history of socialism in relation to past and future, Leichter has erected a monument to a revered and beloved friend and leader.

The unshakable optimism in the face of manyfold crises and defeats which radiates from this book was characteristic of the life of the gallant man whom we mourn.

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