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Gareth Dale

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Gareth Dale : Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Leaning to the Left or Pushed tp the Left?By Lew ButtonKarl Polanyi: A Life on the Left by Gareth DaleColumbia University PressOne of the published reviews of this biography of economist/ thinker Karl Polanyi states, ldquo;The rich historical sourcing provides stimulating material for both scholarly audiences and general readers interested in the lives, contributions, and intellectual thought of fascinating individuals and scholars who lived through this particularly era.rdquo; (Sally Randles)Although the reviewer is right about the rich historical source material she may be mistaken about this book being accessible to the general readers.

First I don't know how many general readers are interested in reading a book about a political economist. Secondly, and more to the point, I don't know how many general readers would be willing to stop and pick up a dictionary every few pages to find the meanings of the words the author uses to write the story. Maybe it is a requirement of Columbia University Press to use as many obscure and little used words as possible to convey a thought that could be said with much simpler words. Maybe the Dr. Fox hypothesis is being tested. I don't think it is necessary for me to include my resume or speak of my experience with language to remind the author that it would have been a much easier read had he used words that most people understand. One example out of many may suffice—in one place he uses the word "bruted". For the record I did not have to look it up because I have a diploma in French and I know what bruted means. But there is a great English expression that would work just as well—it was noised abroad. All that being said, and the preceding is my only complaint, this is a great read. Just this past year *The Great Transformation* was listed as one of the top 25 books on economics. *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left* places Karl Polanyi in the context of his family, his time and his culture, the *Sitz im Leben* of Karl Polanyi to put it another way. Karl Polanyi was very much a person influenced by the events taking place, the cultural shift and the situation of his family. To a great extent that is true of all of us. Sometimes we go with the flow and sometimes we stand against the flow. We can say that Karl Polanyi exercised both positive and negative rheotaxis in response to his culture. The author gives a great historical overview of Habsburg Empire and the conditions in that atmosphere that provided impetus to Karl and other thinkers. The author writes, "It was here and now, that methodological individualism was first introduced into economic theory and here, too, that the priest we being elbowed out by the therapist as the provider of meaningful narratives of life." (Location 90 on my Kindle). The author goes on to point out there was also a tension in the time between individualism and communitarianism. It is obvious that the culture and the time in which Karl Polanyi lived and worked are part of his story and therefore this book provides a valuable piece of his story. The book is well researched and Karl's contemporaries are referenced and quoted. In this same vein the reference to Karl's contemporaries reminds us that Karl did not live in isolation but many of his ideas came in conversation and community with others. When John Donne wrote that no man is an island he reminded us of the importance of community. In Karl's case it wasn't just a community of economists and philosophers but also included the poet AdyAs I read how Jews were treated in Central Europe at this time I thought of the expression "when you point a finger at someone you are pointing three fingers at yourself". Those who criticize Karl Polanyi leaning to the left certainly cannot absolve themselves of responsibility. The climate of Central Europe drove Jewish people to the margins and "accounted for the predisposition of Central European Jewish intellectuals to join revolutionary movements". The record of the marginalization of the Jewish people was one of the most disturbing things I found in this book. We should be reminded that years later they were not just marginalized but depersonalized. I think Columbia University Press should be pleased with this biography of one of her former professors. I recommend this book for its research, historical overview and storytelling and for giving readers an opportunity to grow their vocabulary even if they never use the words themselves. I received a copy of this book from Netgalley.com with the understanding that I would write a review.

Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) was one of the twentieth century's most original interpreters of the market economy. His penetrating analysis of globalization's disruptions and the Great Depression's underlying causes still serves as an effective counterargument to free market fundamentalism. In this first full biography of the intellectual's life and work, we learn how personal and historical events structured Polanyi's clear-eyed analyses and complex convictions. He began his career as a bourgeois radical but transitioned into a Christian socialist with ambivalent views on social democracy, communism, the New Deal, and the intellectual provocations of postwar America. The narrative begins with Polanyi's childhood in the Habsburg Empire and his involvement with the Great War and Hungary's postwar revolution. It connects Polanyi's idealistic radicalism to the political promise and intellectual ferment of Red Vienna and the horror of fascism. The book revisits Polanyi's oeuvre in English, German, and Hungarian, includes exhaustive research in five archives, and features interviews with Polanyi's daughter, students, and colleagues, clarifying the contradictory aspects of the thinker's work. These personal accounts also shed light on Polanyi's network of scholars, Christians, atheists, journalists, hot and cold warriors, and socialists of all stripes. Offering a unique portal into an epoch's ruptures, tensions, and upheavals, this biography reflects and condenses extraordinary times through the life of one of its most engaged witnesses.

Here is the book the many admirers of Karl Polanyi have been waiting for: a vivid, thoroughly researched, and lucidly written intellectual biography that is worthy of its subject. It traces Polanyi's life and developing ideas first in central Europe, then in Britain and North America, showing both their rootedness in the 'lost world' of twentieth-century socialism and their ever-greater relevance to making sense of the market societies of our own time. (Steven Lukes, author of *Power: A Radical View*) One of the best biographies ever written of any intellectual emerging from the horrors of mid-twentieth-century Europe. It meticulously covers the whole ground—from the Jewish roots in Budapest

through the First War, brilliantly reconstructs the milieu and debates of interwar Vienna, and adds enormously to our understanding of The Great Transformation. A compelling portrait, it is successful not just as an intellectual biography but as a personal one as well. (John A. Hall, author of *Ernest Gellner: An Intellectual Biography*) Writing the intellectual biography of one of the truly great thinkers of the twentieth century, an heir to Rousseau?comparable in importance to Max Weber or to John Maynard Keynes?is a daunting enterprise. Particularly so, since Polanyi's life is bound to the history of a European radicalism now defunct or dormant. Gareth Dale is equal to this task, the complexity of which is incredible. I have no doubt that this is a durable work that will be read by generations. Also, it will show that this half-submerged chapter in the chronicle of revolutionary and?to say the same with another word?theoretical upheavals is indispensable for everybody who still insists on being able to think critically. (G. M. Tamaacute;s, author of *Innocent Power: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts*) This is a well-written, often sparkling, always informative, comprehensive narrative about the life and work of Karl Polanyi. The analysis is rich with cultural and historical contextualization, full of interesting allusions and reflections, and wonderfully evocative of the unfolding events on a European and transatlantic stage?it will be the standard reference point for all future work on Polanyi. (Bob Jessop, University of Lancaster) This much needed and accessibly crafted biography by a recognized authority on Karl Polanyi is well researched and supported by a range of sources, including archival material, interviews, and other contemporaneous scholars. The rich historical sourcing provides stimulating material for both scholarly audiences and general readers interested in the lives, contributions, and intellectual thought of fascinating individuals and scholars who lived through this particularly era. (Sally Randles, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Innovation Research) The long wait for an intellectual biography of Karl Polanyi is finally over. The task is intimidating because Polanyi's concepts are difficult to untangle and his life was divided into successive sojourns in five different countries with three different languages. But Gareth Dale has succeeded in writing an engaging and meticulously researched book that illuminates Polanyi's ideas and situates them in their proper historical context. (Fred Block, author of *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi's Critique*) Gareth Dale's new biography offers us a bracing reminder of a far richer world of socialist activity that once existed in much of the West. (Nikil Saval *The Nation*) Gareth Dale has done an outstanding job of recounting Polanyi's very full life in both the political and academic realms.... For those interested in the work, not only of Karl Polanyi... this book will be invaluable. (EH-Net) This terrific book can be read on different levels, learning about Jewish evolution as well as the gross of modernist thinking... Dale deserves great credit for his masterpiece. (Choice) Dale has delivered much-needed, excellent scholarship on the intellectual history of the twentieth century. (European History Quarterly) About the Author Gareth Dale is senior lecturer in politics and international relations at Brunel University, London. His other books include *Karl Polanyi: The Limits of the Market* (2010), *Karl Polanyi: The Hungarian Writings* (2016), and *Green Growth: Ideology, Political Economy, and the Alternatives* (2016).