

# AUSTRIA

## The Problem of Complicity and Responsibility

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EVER since the fall of the Third Reich the Austrian problem has occupied the minds and thoughts of the peace-makers. Even now, when the conclusion of a treaty between the Allies and the new-old Republic of Austria is imminent, the question still stands, whether it is to be a "peace-treaty" or simply a treaty under international law.

Was Austria an enemy, an ally or simply non-existent, while the Second World War was fought?

No doubt must prevail that up to March 11, 1938, the day of the fall of Schuschnigg's administration, Austria existed as a small, but independent nation. Her constitutional life broke down as a consequence of the civil strife, in which the Dollfuss-government had engaged as early as February, 1934. However, the virus of nazism had entered the state-body much earlier, and the problem of responsibility arises fascinatingly before the historian. It is almost a platitude by now when one repeats Hitler's famous narration from his *Mein Kampf*, in which he describes his difficult youth in Vienna, and his interest in the very popular and humoristic anti-Semite, Dr. Karl Lueger, the burgomaster, whom the population adored and the venerable old Francis Joseph detested. It might be mentioned that one of Lueger's most zealous henchmen has been his much more vulgar friend Leopold Kunschak, the present chairman of Austria's National Assembly, who in Lueger's times demanded a money-price for each Jew shot to death . . .

Whereas in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy only German nationalists from Bohemia looked for a sort of "Anschluss", the situation changed when, after 1918, Austria had become a small Danubian country. Economically not very well fitted for her new independent existence, with too small an agricultural basis and too big a capital, she proclaimed herself part of the equally shrunken German Reich, now the Weimarian Republic. This prudential match between both nations, which were headed by socialistic governments, was prevented by the Allies, and each had to lead a life of its own.

As a consequence of petty quarrels Austria's socialists quit the government and left the responsibility to the Catholic (*Christlichsozialen*) Party, i.e. Lueger's followers and their new allies, the vigorously antisemitic and nationalistic *Gross-*deutschen**, predecessors of the only slightly more radical nazis.

Austria's socialists were satisfied to rule the city of Vienna and to criticize the federal government. The influence of the *Grossdeutschen* was far stronger than it was generally thought and far stronger than could have been assumed from their numerical strength. But they furnished the few votes needed to build up the necessary majority in parliament, and so for a long time they busied themselves in filling the openings of government-agencies under their jurisdiction with faithful and fanatical followers. They found their pool in the universities, in the national fraternities and generally in the provincial circles of that intelligentsia which felt itself overshadowed by the more active, more internationally interested and rather Jewish Viennese intellectuals.

From then on—that is, from the early twenties of the 20th century—Austria had practically only *Grossdeutsche* judges and notaries public, for the minister of justice was one of the nationalists, and so was the minister of transportation and of commerce.

In 1932 the last elections were held in Vienna; although the socialists retained their majority in the city-hall the Nazis managed to send a strong minority into the city-assembly. In the same year died Dr. Seipel, who as a matter of fact had broken the power of Austrian socialism, and also the former federal chancellor and erstwhile head of the federal police, Schober, a gifted man and excellent administrator, who, nevertheless, had allowed many *Grossdeutsche* to take police-jobs.

In 1933 the new chancellor Dollfuss sent parliament home and began a rule by executive-orders, and at the same time a very valiant fight against Nazi propaganda and Nazi terror. The diminutive politician began as an amusing representative of small Austria and was perhaps the first who resisted Nazi Germany. Italy and Hungary impressed upon him the alleged necessity of going ahead against socialistic Vienna, and Dollfuss started his nonsensical and criminal, although victorious, struggle against Austria's socialists. Many of the disappointed workers, deprived of their party-homes and assembly-houses, joined less and less secretly the outlawed Nazi party. The events of July, 1934, the murder of Dollfuss and the subsequent awakening of a weak Austrian nationalism under Schuschnigg's leadership pushed back Nazism for a short while—only to find the movement secretly strengthened in the fateful year 1936, when Schuschnigg on 11 July signed the ill-famed pact with Germany.

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Therein the government of Hitler recognized Austria's dependence, while Austria promised to preserve her own German character, but the question arises—not to mention the fact that the pact contained secret clauses, according to Schuschnigg's book *Three Times Austria*—whether any proud and patriotic government would have signed such a treaty with dictatorship the aggressive plans of which long had been known to everybody but Europe's blinded governments.

The world knows how things developed in Central Europe after that event, but it never became quite clear—until recently why Austria's unhappy Schuschnigg took it upon himself to invite Hitler the famous visit at Berchtesgaden on the 12th of February, 1938. The Austrian politician gives a highly interesting account of a nonsensical motivation, of a futile beginning that only hurried the end.<sup>1</sup>

It was Ambassador von Papen who asked the Austrian Chancellor how "we"—so says Schuschnigg—would react to an invitation to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Dollfuss, from whom Schuschnigg derived his power, had been murdered on orders from Germany. Austria still was shocked by the discovery of a recent conspiracy that had been planned by a man with the initials "R.H.", undoubtedly Rudolf Hess; its aim had been to cause riots by the assassination of ambassador von Papen during a theatrical performance in Vienna. Thereupon the Reichswehr was to march into Austria in order to re-establish peace and order. Of course, the Nazi party wanted to get rid of the ever suspected von Papen, and it remains a mystery why the latter finally did not sever the ties that joined him to his would-be murderers, as they had been during the blood-purge 1934.

Thus the historian apparently is faced with two puzzles: why did von Papen remain in the service of the Nazis? why did Schuschnigg in principle accept an invitation from the German headquarters?

The problem of von Papen might be solved by the study of the elements of the appeasement. By yielding and yielding to the aggressor, the murderer may be reconciled; when we remain on the side of the conspirators, we may become conspirators ourselves and finally share in the booty. Von Papen probably tried to convince his would-be-murderers,

<sup>1</sup> "Die Begegnung von Berchtesgaden am 12. Februar 1938" ("The Meeting at Berchtesgaden") *Die Neue Rundschau*, Stockholm, April, 1946, pp. 352 ff.

who for a long time had suspected him, that he indeed was one of theirs. He tried to show his zeal for the Nazi religion in spite of all punishment it inflicted upon him like the Church militant.

The problem of Schuschnigg might be solved by a study of the character and mentality of the last chancellor of an independent pre-Hitlerite Austria. Schuschnigg did not lack physical courage. He was the son of an old and high-ranking Austrian officer; he had been himself a valiant member of the Imperial armed forces. But he was sadly lacking in sharp, farsighted intelligence, imagination and—astonishing as it may sound—ready response in forensic situations.

Schuschnigg originally had been an attorney-at-law. How did he prepare his radical change of policy toward the Third Reich? The man who never had tried in earnest to bring about a reconciliation with the embittered workers of Vienna and the "red" industrial towns of the republic answered right away that he was ready to go, on only one condition: that he was to be informed beforehand as to the topic of the negotiations.

The very small successor of Metternich—he held office in the great man's Viennese palace—did exactly the opposite of what he ought to have done. The topic of the negotiation was very clear. It probably was Austria and her near-annexation by Germany. The answer should have been that he, Schuschnigg, had first to inform the Federal President as head of the authoritarian state of Austria—ever since the proclamation of the ill-fated Dollfuss-Constitution of May 1, 1934—and the preparation of the visit should have consisted in consulting with the other members of the cabinet and especially with the other European cabinets. Wily von Papen promised that the negotiations would result in an improvement of Austria's situation; should the worst happen, then the German-Austria relations would remain as bad as they actually were in January, 1938. Papen backed his promise upon a Hitler-promise. Whereupon Schuschnigg left for Berchtesgaden.

Hitler and von Papen were thus trusted by the man who had been invested with his high office over Dollfuss' bloody corpse; who had lived through Hitler's beginnings, through the first news of arsons, of establishments of concentration-camps, of broken treaties and broken promises. Investigation of the terrorist actions of the Nazi party in Austria always had led back to the headquarters in Munich; yet Austria's leading statesman trusted Hitler and his henchman.

There is no reason to doubt that Schuschnigg reports truthfully his conversation with the German Fuehrer, and one cannot say that the Austrian committed serious mistakes while discussing Austria's future with her deadliest enemy. Rather interesting seems the conclusion that Hitler, too, spoke mostly the truth:

(1) He reminded Schuschnigg of his, Hitler's, popularity with the broad masses of the German nation;

(2) He reminded his guest that every detail of Austrian government-measures was immediately reported to the Nazi party in Germany and to the Fuehrer. The treason of many Austrians was an important weapon during the debate, and Schuschnigg himself has sadly to admit that he saw many Austrians on the Obersalzberg.

(3) Hitler said, "And there, where you are sitting now, an English diplomat was sitting recently. Outside, before my window hundreds and hundreds of Austrians passed by, men, women, children, halfstarved and ragged. One could see their misery. They had come only to see me, to beseech me as their saviour, that I would liberate them from their misery."

From Schuschnigg's report we may conclude that all the stories that he had been mistreated, insulted and threatened by his host are to be dismissed as exaggerations, even as lies. Under the pressure of facts, especially that his regime was highly unpopular with the population of Austria, Schuschnigg signed a pact whereby Austria became a Nazi state *de facto*.

During the preceding conversation Hitler had challenged Schuschnigg with the following words (according to the Austrian's report): "Try it for once, and let Austria have a plebiscite, which would put us against each other; then you will see things!"

Austria's chancellor says he answered as follows: "If that would be possible! However, you know yourself, Herr Reichskanzler, that it is just impossible."

We must ask why Schuschnigg considered such a plebiscite impossible? Three weeks later he ordered the plebiscite and probably hurried the catastrophe. One is left to wonder whether the Austrian did not regard the plebiscite as impossible because he thought that Germany would even win the plebiscite since most Austrians already looked to the Nazi magician?

The events rolled on, and their history is well known. On

February 20, 1938, Hitler delivered his speech before the Reichstag and declared that Austria belonged to the German orbit. On 24 February Schuschnigg underlined Austria's independence, but the cabinet had been transformed according to German wishes. The Austrian Nazis grew more and more audacious, behaved like the heirs of political power. On 8 March Schuschnigg decreed a plebiscite for a "German, Christian, independent" Austria, to be held on the following Sunday, and it was hard for the few communists and the many socialists to vote for the clerical dictatorship, although it appeared rather probable that they would do so. The German government, well aware that Schuschnigg might enforce a victory in his plebiscite, arranged in the Italian fashion, sent an ultimatum to Vienna, and Schuschnigg resigned. Under German pressure Hitler's candidate, Seyss-Inquart, took office.

We have to acknowledge that unfortunately the Austrian government showed a very correct behavior toward Nazism and that only the proclamation of the plebiscite was a violation of the interview at Berchtesgaden. Hitler had asked for a kind of election that would leave the choice between him and Schuschnigg to the Austrian people. The Austrian chancellor had answered that this was impossible, but defiantly and without securing any help from abroad he ordered the plebiscite that he had denied Hitler.

Schuschnigg showed personal courage by declining any escape: after his resignation he remained a prisoner, and incidentally among his jailers was one man whom he had seen on the Obersalzberg. In his famous resignation-speech over the radio he broadcast to the Austrian people his complaints concerning the deplorable happenings and forbade any resistance. He remained in the country and committed one of the greatest mistakes in Austrian history: no steps were taken to form immediately a government-in-exile to carry on the business of an independent, albeit occupied, Austria. Most of the public employees of the small country proved themselves infamously subservient to their new masters. For instance, the beautiful house of the Austrian legation at Washington, D. C., was handed over immediately to the Germans by the Austrian minister, who did not show any ambition to found or to assist any movement for the independence of the fallen country.

That Hitler held his own plebiscite the next month after the *Anschluss* with a crushing success does not matter. Everybody knows how these plebiscites were made. It counts, however, more that the antisemitic slogan of the Nazi party found the widest appeal among the Austrian population, which also

everywhere—with the fewest exceptions—approved of and participated in the looting of Jewish possessions. More characteristic than even these actions, which still may be charged to the mob, to the scum—although it has been proved that even the middle-classes profited considerably by these actions—remains the fact that only very few individuals of Jewish creed or race managed to hide in the cities or in the country with "Aryan" friends. While again and again people of that unhappy racial group show up in France, in Belgium, in Italy, in the Netherlands, in Norway, where, very often refugees from abroad, they were hidden by the population, which worked together against the enemy, Austria has only very few cases of actual assistance and help given to her own Jews.

The orders and decrees of the occupying force were obeyed slavishly, and about Vienna, possibly about all of Austria, an Italian observer, Rochira, "made the statement that high life in the central section has considerably deteriorated, but that the great mass of the people are working, live better, and are more and more favorable to the regime."<sup>2</sup> This statement comes from a source that was friendlier to Schuschnigg's Mussolinian Fascism than to Nazism itself.

It is not without significance that—not to mention Hitler himself—not fewer than three leading Nazis tried and found guilty by the international court at Nuernberg were Austrians or of Austrian descent: Kaltenbrunner, Seyss-Inquart, and Neurath the opportunist.

The international world is absolutely left in the dark as to Austrian contributions to Austria's liberation. Austria is able, of course, to show a number of martyrs; most of these, however, were Jews whom Austrians themselves handed over to the German authorities for "special treatment." On the other hand, many non-Jewish fighters against Nazism had to pay with their lives.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Austrian population according to the reliable reports of refugees who arrived late in America, did not take any chances against the violators of basic human rights. Austrian troops were the first to enter Paris after its fall.<sup>3</sup> The German authorities used as spies and occupational forces in these respective countries young Austrians who, underfed children after World War I, had enjoyed the hospitality of Norway or the Netherlands. No revolution in Austria occurred after the Allies invited the Austrian population to rise and to contribute to its liberation; the declaration of

2. *The Ciano Diaries*, New York, 1946, p. 33 (Feb. 24, 1939).

3. William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, New York, 1941, p. 416.

Moscow, 1943, did not find a special echo in Austria. As a matter of fact, the strongly national-socialistic western provinces of Austria accepted large parts of Germany's bombed out Nazi-population, sheltered them and still continue to do so, while Austrian refugees, returning from abroad, have terrible difficulties to find housing and employment.

The federal government of the reborn Austrian republic certainly has been aware of the many hints that Austria has not done enough in the universal fight against Nazism, and a particularly painful truth is the fact that uncounted young American fliers died a cruel death at the hands of the SD, headed by the Austrian Nazi-leader Kaltenbrunner, one of the hanged Nuernberg delinquents, in the camp of Mauthausen on the Danube, between Vienna and Linz. Therefore, one has to welcome the Red-White-Red-Book that the Austrian government published last year for the purpose of whitewashing Austria as a whole and to furnish proof of her contributions to the battle against Hitler.

The statements in this book, which can only be studied from excerpts, are not much less peculiar than the statements of the late Goebbels. Before the "Anschluss" it was a platitude more than a truth that Styria and the Burgenland belonged to the strongest Nazi provinces of the country; Styria especially was well known in this respect, and the joke went around in Vienna that even the rabbi of Graz, capital of that beautiful province, had to be a secret member of the illegal SA. The Austrian government maintained in the Red-White-Red-Book that in the year 1945 a card-index was found, containing the names of the illegal Nazis before the *Anschluss*. According to the quoted review of that official Austrian publication both provinces with altogether 1,100,000 inhabitants had only 6,751 registered illegal Nazi party-members, i.e., less than .6%.

Proudly the official author calls to the attention of the reader that already in the first week over 70,000 men and women were arrested by the occupying Nazi authorities; this alone shows that there did not exist any friendship for the Hitler-regime. But how many of these 70,000 were Jews?

The Innsbruck Gestapo reported on June 29, 1938, that "the percentage of out-and-out Nazi sympathizers among the federal employees has been rather small before March 13, 1938 and amounted to 15% at the most." Then the clever Gestapo-observer warns his Berlin superiors not to be deceived by the famous 99% result of the Hitlerian plebiscite. One is glad to admit that the Gestapo-reports, beginning July, 1939, list

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the Austrian population actively and efficiently—or even silently, but for good will's sake—showed sympathy or at least assistance to the main victims of Nazism: the Jews and the prisoners of war.

With possibly justifiable pride the Austrian government asserts that 80% of all German courts martial were directed against Austrian defendants, which is not quite understandable if you think of the enormous, fantastic number of non-Austrians executed by the Nazis; but perhaps they were doomed without trial in law-courts. The Austrian government also asserts that of 685 persons executed in Vienna 452 were sentenced on the charge of "treason" against the Nazi government.

Let us hope that those martyrs were more active fighters than the poor elderly lady whom the province of Vorarlberg regarded as anti-nazi. Mrs. Karoline Redler died on the scaffold in Vienna, on 3 November, 1943, after she had been condemned to death because of high treason. In August, 1943, the poor woman allegedly had said in a doctor's waiting-room that Austria had been better off before the *Anschluss*. Her words were exaggerated, and so Mrs. Redler's fate was sealed. Up to the last she maintained her innocence and her courage.

There is no reason not to admire Mrs. Redler, who encouraged and comforted less poised fellow-sufferers under the very shadow of the Nazi guillotine, but one symbolic pillar is missing from her hall of glory, and may be in Austria's, too. Why did she not maintain the appearance of a true anti-nazi fighter? Why did she not protest her innocence even in the very presence of the hangman? A proud, a fighting anti-nazi always has been and always will be guilty in the eyes of those who stand for all that is evil on earth. When someone protests his innocence, someone maintains never to have uttered words against the regime, then he is guilty! Guilty before mankind.

The things of the past belong to the past. The majestic spire of St. Stephen stands near the burned out cathedral, an empty

The Austrian government has an enormous task to fulfill in proving that Austria never will become a conspirator, an accomplice against the rest of the world. Through its actions it must bear evidence of its good will:

1) The indemnification-laws must be speeded up and enforced;

2) Not only will it be the government's duty to dismiss sympathizers from their official positions...

employees will have no further opportunity to work against their government under the cover of their own security. Not only will the government be under obligation to cancel the old age-pensions of the disloyal federal employees, but it will have to consider measures whereby the old age-pensions, those federal guarantees of absolute security that lure the youth into Civil Service jobs, will be granted only as rewards for faithful and loyal service.

(3) The number of positions under Civil Service should be restricted considerably.

(4) Austria must show her good will to break with Nazism and to assist its victims. Only a very extensive general levy will furnish the necessary means; this levy should tax especially capital accumulated under the Nazi administration, for everybody who enriched himself under Nazism, whose income showed an increase between the years 1938 and 1945, profited from Nazism and cannot be regarded as an enemy of the Hitler-regime.

Austria will not be able to maintain her claim to have been Nazism's first victim while her authorities issue indemnity-laws that fix the terms for filing claims in such a way that the victims in foreign countries have not even the time to comply with the Austrian laws, and at the same time many proprietors of real estate seized by the Gestapo are able to improve their new possessions by erecting new buildings or improving the old ones. Such improvements prove that many Austrians were able to enrich themselves, to profit twice under the Nazi regime: once, when they were able to get property cheaply, and a second time, when they improve the newly gained property. It will be the task of the government to bring this type of profiteer to account, even those who may have lost everything through bombardments.

The coalition-government to-day is composed of all three parties of Austria. Not a single party must attempt to become a pool for all the many Nazis who have become "homeless" in a political sense.

Only the highest amount of energy will bring Austria into that place among the nations that she certainly claims: a place next to those nations that fought Nazism consistently and victoriously!