

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-12
The Mother's Day Election

Vienna
11, Obere Donaustrasse 57/1/6
14 May 1959

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Lower Austrian village of Zwettl (pop. 3812) occupies a valley in the center of the Waldviertel, a gently-rolling plateau that is a southward extension of the Bohemian highlands of Czechoslovakia. Fifteen miles northwest is the Czech frontier, 35 miles southeast is Krems on the Danube. This is legendary country, the entrance to the Wachau, that castle-studded, romantic section of the Danube valley from which the Niebelungenlied once came. It is a poor part of Austria, half pine forest, traditionally Catholic and conservative, cramped under ten years of Russian occupation that ended less than four years ago. The village boasts three inns, two of which turn out to be part barnyard, at least one modern gasoline station, and a dusty market place. Two miles away is a wondrous Cistercian monastery, founded in 1137, with a Gothic-cum-Baroque church big enough to be a major cathedral.

At dusk last Friday the country roads that lead to Zwettl - winding through dark Bohemian forests past village churches whose spires are more Czech than German - carried an unusual amount of traffic, converging on the largest of the three inns: small German-Czech- and Italian-made cars and stationwagons, for the most part, and dozens of the inevitable motor-bikes, all dusty and inclined to smell of the barnyard. The farmers of the Waldviertel had come to hear the Federal Chancellor and leader of the Austrian People's Party, Julius Raab, and his colleague on the local party list, Prof. Dr. Leopold Schönbauer, issue their last appeals to the voters before the fifth national election to be held in the Second Republic.

Both were coming from an earlier rally at the smaller village of Weitra up by the Czech border. Dr. Schönbauer arrived first, and spoke first. He is the most famous doctor in Austria, for many years the head of the huge (and antiquated) General Hospital of Vienna. An outstanding surgeon who preserves the manner and appearance of a country doctor, he made a reputation by giving homely medical advice on the radio and, earlier, by surviving the Nazi years as head of the hospital while keeping Czechs and even Jews on his staff in defiance of German pressure. Late in life, he decided to enter politics and, after playing with the right-wing German Nationalist Freedom Party (FPÖ), switched to the People's Party (ÖVP) and was promptly given a prominent position in major ÖVP rallies and entrusted with the specific job of winning the election in the Waldviertel.

Election District #10, including the Waldviertel, was considered a sensitive area in this campaign. In the last national election, in 1956,

the People's Party had polled 102,333 to the Socialists' 53,194 and won five seats out of the seven allotted to the district. But the fifth OVP mandate had been won, according to the complicated Austrian electoral arithmetic, by a margin of only 803 votes, and in recent elections the Lower Austrian rural areas, traditionally the great bastion of strength for the clerical People's Party, had been giving ever more votes to the Socialists. To stop the rot Chancellor Raab and the supposedly popular Dr. Schönbauer were put at the top of the list of candidates in District #10, and in obscure Zwettl they came to make their last speeches of the campaign.

Gasthaus Berger was crowded to overflow, and outside more people gathered in the dusty street to listen to a loudspeaker hooked to the speakers' table. Inside the long room was gray with tobacco smoke, strong with the smell of beer. Overworked waitresses in Dirndls and high shoes pushed through the sitting and standing farmers with an insistent "Achtung, bitte!" and trays of beerglasses held high over their heads. The voice of Dr. Schönbauer was relayed throughout the room by loudspeakers. He talked of the progress of medicine in the last sixty years, made little country doctor's jokes about pills and injections, and said little about the election issues. It was basically the same speech he had made two days earlier to a mammoth rally on the Rathausplatz (City Hall Square) in Vienna.



GASTHAUS BERGER - the morning after

The farmers of the Waldviertel sat stolidly, smoking and drinking beer and exchanging occasional comment with their neighbors. The room was warm, and one or two dozed over their half-liter glasses. But most listened attentively, their lined faces, good country faces with dark hair, light eyes and shaggy moustaches, showing neither approval or disapproval. From where I stood, near the back, I could see few women. I later found that most of them were seated up front, before the podium. I had thought they must be there, because both speakers took pains to comment on the decisive role of women voters in Austrian elections (they outnumbered the men by over half a million this time: 2.6 million women, 2.0 million men.)

At the end of Dr. Schönbauer's medical homilies, Chancellor Raab arrived, also from Weitra, and was greeted enthusiastically. At least one supposes the greeting was enthusiastic, because the volume of applause was greater. Faces remained unmoved, in striking contrast to the Mediterranean animation of a political rally in Vienna.

Raab's speech, too, was the same he had given at a Vienna gathering earlier in the week. There were small variations. He used an occasional simple Russian word in an appropriate spot - "nyet" or "khorosho" - and always got a subdued chuckle - the farmers of the Waldviertel had lived with the "plunderers" for ten years. He made a concession to local German nationalism by referring to Germans as "draussen im Reich" (out there in the Reich), but balanced it by an oblique reference to ex-Nazis in the Freedom Party. And his jokes about the Socialists seemed a little less biting.

When the speeches were over, the assembled farmers left the hall quietly, and in ten minutes it was nearly empty. I waited to watch the speakers leave, and by the time I was outside, most of the crowd and most of the cars and motorbikes had already disappeared. In the front room of the inn, by the zinc bar, where the speeches could not be heard, the same two dozen people at the half dozen tables were drinking another round of beer.

Two days later Austria voted. In District #10, there were 4084 less votes cast than in 1956. The People's Party lost 5,618, their heaviest loss in the country, the Socialists lost 114, and only the Freedom Party gained - 2,563 votes. The OVP tally fell to 96,715, against 53,080 for the SPÖ, and the fifth mandate of the ÖVP was lost. There were 7 thousand votes for the FPÖ and 1,580 for the Communists. Dr. Schönbauer had not come through for the People's Party but his own seat in Parliament was assured.

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Election day was Mother's Day. The Socialists' favorite election poster showed a nice, grayhaired old lady and said: "Mother's advice on Mother's Day: 'I vote for the future of my children - List #2, Socialist Party.'" The People's Party and the FPÖ also talked of the significance of mother's day and the election, which led one acquaintance of mine (wife of a conservative journalist and mother of three) to declare that she was going to vote Communist - until, on election eve, the Communists appealed to the voter, for mother's sake, to vote Communist.

It was a proper election for Mother's Day: the campaign had been short (it was begun only after Easter), quiet, essentially dull, and the balloting was equally quiet, without incident except for one old man who died in a voting booth - after marking his ballot. Most of the real issues between the two major parties were quite ignored.

So there were no sensations in the campaign, no great changes in the voting. The Socialists gained 80 thousand votes to become (by 25 thousand the largest party in the country, as the People's Party lost 72 thousand and fell to second place. This had happened in 1953 - two elections ago. This week, as then, electoral arithmetic in Austria's complicated system of modified proportional representation worked in favor of the People's Party, who will again - as in the 1953-56 Parliament - have a one-mandate edge over the Socialists in the Nationalrat (Lower house).

The Communist Party lost a third of its few votes, securing this time only 3.3% of the ballot. In the process they also lost their "basic mandate": under the Austrian system, to keep splinter parties from cluttering up the Parliament, a party must win one seat somewhere in the country outright in order to participate in the further proportional

dividing up of the spoils. The Communists have now failed to preserve their "basic mandate" in Northeast Vienna, and with it the other two seats they had held as a result of proportional representation. They now disappear from both the Federal Parliament and the Lower Austrian state legislature - and in the estimation of all observers of all political color, they have disappeared forever.

The German-nationalist Freedom Party picked up 52,000 votes and two representatives. This was, in my opinion, the only surprise of the elect they had expected to do much better as a result of corruption scandals and growing dissatisfaction with the coalition system to which they provide the only alternative. It seemed reasonable to guess that they would double their representation (from six to twelve M.P.s); they added only two, and now seem condemned to remain a marginal factor in national politics although of significance in a Parliament evenly divided between the major parties.

The Austrian electoral system is peculiarly complicated, and, since Austria is a small country, it has certainly not been examined by many Americans. This is perhaps a pity, since it is an improvement in some respects on the standard "proportional representation systems" studied in American political science courses.

The Nationalrat, or Lower House, as established by the Constitution of 1920 (amended 1929, abolished by the Dollfuss coup in 1934, re-established with the Second Republic in 1945), consists of 165 seats, which are apportioned among 25 Election Districts in accordance with their population. (Thus, Vienna and its surroundings make up 7 Election Districts with a total of 40 mandates.) When the ballots are in and counted, an Election Number (Wahlzahl) is calculated for each District, equal to the number of valid ballots cast in the District divided by the number of seats allotted plus one. This is then the number of votes a party must get to secure one seat, or Basic Mandate. The number of Basic Mandates won by each party in each district is therefore determined by dividing the number of votes cast for the party by the Wahlzahl.

Thus, if District #15 has (hypothetically) nine mandates to elect, and 207,000 valid ballots are cast, the Wahlzahl will be 20,700 (207,000 ÷ 10), and the mandates might be distributed as follows:

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| Party A - 121,000 votes = 5 representatives, "unused" votes: 17,500 |
| Party B - 55,000 votes = 2 representatives, "unused" votes: 13,600 |
| Party C - 30,000 votes = 1 representative, "unused" votes: 9,300 |
| Party D - 1,000 Votes = 0 representative, "unused" votes: 1,000 |
| Total 8 representatives, "unused" votes: <u>41,400</u> |

The ninth mandate belonging to District #15, which in this case was not awarded in this first apportionment, becomes a "Remaining Mandate", to be awarded in a second apportionment. The 25 Election Districts are

for this purpose grouped in four "Election District Unions" (the seven Districts of Vienna, for example, make up one of these unions). The "Remaining Mandates" and the "unused" votes within each union are assembled, a new Wahlzahl for the second apportionment is calculated by a formula that only mathematicians understand, and the "Remaining Mandates" are then determined. The number of these "Remaining Mandates" for the second apportionment will, of course, vary from one election to another; this week there were 20 of them out of the 165, or one for each Election District except five. Before an election the professional guessers put much of their effort and some slide rule work into trying to figure how these "Remaining Mandates" will fall.

An important qualification to this system provides that a party must win one Basic Mandate somewhere in the country in order to participate in the second apportionment at all. This provision, designed to keep splinter parties out of Parliament, is what banned all three former Communist deputies from the Nationalrat in this election.

I have gone into this in some detail because all foreign newspapers I have seen in the last days have headlined this Communist defeat, this loss of their three remaining representatives. The western press has tended to overplay the significance of the defeat, the Communist press has cried that the result proves Austria to be an undemocratic state. The Communist vote fell by a third, they point out, but under a pure proportional system, they would still have been entitled to two seats.

In fact, the Communists had saved their Basic Mandate in the 1956 election only by quasi-legal maneuvering before the vote. In Austria the citizen votes in the precinct in which he is registered as living (at precinct police headquarters). Communist strength in the country is concentrated in Election District #4, Northeast Vienna, consisting primarily of industrial Floridsdorf and the decayed former Jewish district of Leopoldstadt. But even three years ago (before Hungary) the Communist mandate here was considered threatened. Communists living elsewhere in the capital usually have cousins in this district and during this last election many of these "moved in" with their relatives in Floridsdorf and Leopoldstadt just before voting day. The same stunt was tried this year, but failed to work a second time: the Communist vote in District #4 fell by 7,202, despite reinforcements, and was almost 5000 under the Wahlzahl for the district. In 1956 the Communists, in addition to their hardly-won Basic Mandate in District #4, had added two "Remaining Mandates" in the second apportionment: one in the rest of Vienna, one in Lower Austria. Although their 64,761 votes in the Vienna "Election District Union" would still have entitled them to this "remaining mandate", it, too, was lost, because there was no Basic Mandate.

So Dr. Ernst Fischer, Johann Koplenig and Franz Honner will not be heard in the new Parliament of Austria.

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If the world press has tended to concentrate on the Communist defeat it is surely because the election has no other significance outside of Austria. The Socialists and the People's Party are of one mind on foreign policy: neutrality, but not neutralism, and European cooperation. The

internal issues on which the election was fought were undramatic and not really basic.

When one wades through the statistics and the mass of post-election armchair analysis that filled the newspapers and the coffeehouse conversations in the 72 hours after the last results were announced, significant observations can be reduced to a very few:

1. The People's Party, the "victors with one black eye", because they preserved their one-man lead in Parliament despite their second place in popular vote, will continue to provide the Federal Chancellor for the Black-Red coalition that has governed the country since 1945, and the Chancellor will continue to be Julius Raab.

2. But as the Coalition agreement is re-negotiated before the new government is formed, the Socialists will demand concessions in personnel and policy to answer their increased electoral strength. The eight voice of the Freedom Party will be used by both major parties to threaten one another with an OVP-FPO or SPÖ-FPO coalition as an alternative to the present establishment.

3. The continued shrinkage of the Communist vote is welcomed in all non-Communist quarters (conservative, socialist and independent commentators are agreed in speaking of the Communist Party as having now disappeared permanently from Austrian politics), but their definitive disappearance from Parliament is regretted by a surprising number of people. This regret is born partially of a vague (and probably incorrect) notion that a Communist Party out of Parliament will somehow be better fitted to carry on subversive activity in unions and local communities. It is also based on a correct judgment that Parliamentary debates will now be even duller and Parliamentary decisions even more unopposed than before, and that the Freedom Party, with its neo-Nazi taint, may profit from having a monopoly on parliamentary opposition.

4. All trends in this election were virtually uniform throughout the country. This is especially noteworthy in a land in which capital and provinces have usually moved in very different directions, and in which industrial areas and agricultural ones superficially have few problems in common. The Socialists gained in all but two of the 25 Electoral Districts, while in those two the total vote cast was smaller than before and the Socialists lost far less than either the People's Party or the Communists. The OVP lost votes in every district, as did the Communists. The Freedom Party gained in every district except two (these two, in Styria, provide a curious case, since Styria is the original home of liberal Pan-German nationalism in Austria).

5. Within the framework of these nationally uniform trends, it is demographically significant that the Socialists have simultaneously made up their losses in Vienna in 1956 (when the permanent Socialist majority in the capital was threatened for the first time since its establishment in 1911) while continuing their slow gains at the expense of the People's Party in traditionally conservative Lower Austria. (Vienna and Lower Austria together contain over three million of Austria's 6.8 million inhabitants). The People's Party lost 23 thousand votes in Vienna - a third of their total losses in the country - and 16 thousand in Lower Austria.

6. The country continues to be so evenly divided between right and left that the leaders are surely right in concluding that the Red-Black coalition, with all its drawbacks, continues to have a mandate from the electorate. While many conservatives and Socialists may be reluctant to voice mild dissatisfaction with the system by voting for the Freedom Party with all its Nazis, any really deep and widespread disgruntlement would surely have produced a far larger FPÖ vote this time than actually occurred. But the evenness of the present division between Red and Black will not make the creation of a more viable and energetic Coalition any easier. The present deadlock on economic issues, including the new rent act, the expansion of the "people's shares" system of creating proletarian capitalists, the building program, and agricultural price policies may well continue, to the disadvantage of the whole country.

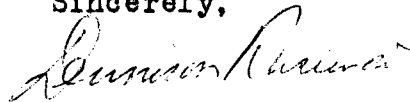
7. It is worth noting, in this regard, that, while the Socialists are now the strongest single party in popular voting strength, the right-wing parties (ÖVP and FPÖ), with a combined vote of 2,263,000, are still marginally stronger than the left-wing parties (Socialists and Communists), with 2,096,000. Looked at in this light, the movement toward the left in the past three years has been approximately 0.6%.

8. The products of the "baby boom" that began in Austria in 1938 are beginning to reach voting age and are slightly more Socialist than their parents: an analysis of the statistics suggests that the majority of this record number of new voters helped the SPÖ to make its jump into first place. The Socialist Party, through a lively youth organization and through encouraging younger leaders to come forward and replace the old guard (four of the most distinguished older Socialist politicians did not stand for re-election last week), has done a better job of capturing the imagination and energies of the young. The People's Party has come under sharp fire for continuing to headline the same names that have led the party since 1945, and for stubbornly refusing to consider any internal reform.

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The 1959 election has given the Coalition a new lease on life, but under conditions that will make it very difficult for the government to be any more positively productive than it has been since 1957. The road of caution, security, and no experiments has been chosen, even though it also looks like the road to stagnation. This is the road that Austrians have traditionally taken.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

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