

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR 13
The Mother's Day Election - 2

Vienna
11, Obere Donaustrasse 578186
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Austrian Federal elections of May 10th, 1959, could have happened only in Austria. Constitutionally, the old Parliament had a year to go: it was elected on May 13th, 1956, for a four year term. The government had not been and in fact could not be defeated on a vote and forced to resign: the Black-Red coalition had controlled 156 of the 165 seats in the Nationalrat. Nor was it a matter of the government choosing a time (as the British government usually does) when a reference to the electorate might be hoped to be to the advantage of the government and the disadvantage of the opposition: the opposition here hardly matters.

Only a few months before, the leaders of the two coalition parties had agreed that elections should be moved up about six months and held in the autumn of 1959, instead of May, 1960. Then, early in March, the Austrian People's Party abruptly announced that the Coalition (which has been running the country since 1945) was no longer workable, and that the People's Party favored a May election to settle the issue.

The Socialist Party of Austria, the other partner of the Coalition, hesitated, complained that they had not found the Coalition unworkable, and then reluctantly agreed to a dissolution - on the reasonable ground that, if the larger partner insisted the Coalition would not work, the larger partner was in a good position to see to it that it could not work.

So an election was called because a government ostensibly in a strong position declared it could no longer carry on the business of running the country. The date was set and the government parties agreed that the campaign should start after Easter (and thus last only forty days, a saving of money and the patience of the electorate) - and that there should be no mud thrown at personalities.

There was an air of unreality about the whole thing. No great changes were to be anticipated: the Communists were expected to lose votes and probably their remaining mandates in Parliament, the small Freedom Party was expected to gain a little at the expense of both major parties, and the Socialists would pick up most of the votes lost by the Communists. Since both major parties announced from the beginning that they intended to form a new Coalition, it remained completely unclear just how a new election was supposed to resolve the problem of the unworkability of the old one.

As the campaign progressed, some attempt was made to clear a bit of this obscurity, as both major parties developed their initial positions. The Socialists, who had not found the old Coalition unworkable, proclaimed themselves in favor of its continuation in fundamentally unaltered form.

The People's Party, on the other hand, declared that the only solution lay in a change in the Coalition pact. Heretofore, when an issue could not be agreed between the two parties in the "Coalition committee", it never came before Parliament. This procedure had been a primary target for anti-Coalition criticism. Now, said the People's Party, we believe that an issue that cannot be resolved within the Coalition should be brought before the Parliament and decided by a majority vote - as in most other democracies.

This became, in fact, the only real issue in the 1959 election. And although it was never said by either side, both the ÖVP and the SPÖ plainly realized that the change, which on the surface appeared wholesome and unobjectionable, would in practice work against the Socialists: unless the People's Party lost a great many mandates, they would always be able to obtain a majority on the floor of Parliament by a combination with the handful of Freedom Party delegates, and the FPÖ, representing old-fashioned liberal nationalism, would almost always agree with the ÖVP on economic issues and so defeat the Socialists.

This issue was, I believe, never made clear to the electorate. To judge from the election placards that on Easter Monday suddenly covered the advertising kiosks and boardings of the Federal Republic, the real election issue was related, but different: the Socialists declared that "The ÖVP wants an autocracy" and pictured the People's Party as pursuing the "Dollfuss Way" (Engelbert Dollfuss, conservative Chancellor in 1934, established a dictatorship and outlawed the Socialists) instead of the "Renner Street" (Dr. Karl Renner, a Socialist leader, presided over successful Black-Red coalitions in both 1918 and 1945, then became President of the Republic). The People's Party declared, "Voter, don't be confused. The danger of autocracy threatens from the Left. The ÖVP is the guarantee of cooperative work and has already proved it!"

It never seemed to occur to either party that this identical campaign slogan - "the other fellow wants to be sole ruler!" - involved an absurdity: in any normal democracy it would be taken for granted that each party wants to obtain a majority and rule alone. But in Austria each major party appealed to the electorate, from innumerable posters and letters sent through the mails, to vote for it only to prevent the other party from achieving an absolute majority and forming a government without coalition. And yet each party had bound itself, as its first campaign promise, to continue the Coalition!

Thus the most effective Socialist poster showed the Austrian ship of state listing to the right with 82 Black representatives and only 74 Socialist. The slogan: "Secure the balance!" Another version of the same placard pointed out: "Eighty-two ÖVP representatives and only seventy-four Socialists sat in the last Nationalrat. Any party that has more than half, that is 83 representatives, has a majority, that is, it can rule alone. If the ÖVP on May 10th wins a single seat more, then cooperative work is over! For Federal Chancellor Raab specifically declared on October 18th, 1958, that Seipel and Dollfuss are his models. They too ruled alone and took Austria with them to destruction. Prevent the autocracy of the ÖVP! Secure cooperative work! Vote List 2 - Socialist Party."

The people's party worked over the same theme: "They want all power!" was their cry against the Socialists, and the emphasis was placed on the fact that since the Federal President is a Socialist, the Federal Chancellor (dependent on the majority in Parliament) must remain a Black. "So Red?" asked a circular with an entirely red front page. "Yes, so red would it be in Austria, if the Socialists achieve a majority on May 10th. Because the SPO already occupy the following important key positions in the state: Federal President, Justice Minister, Minister of Interior. If the Socialists should become the strongest party, they would also occupy the following meaningful functions: Federal Chancellor, President of the Nationalrat, and Finance Minister. Then the balance in the state would be destroyed with one blow, then overnight the entire power would be given to one party, then the way would be open for the autocracy of the Socialists!"



Election Propaganda in Leopoldstadt

And in another circular the People's Party quoted triumphantly from an interview given December 13th, 1958, by "one of the leading men of the Socialist Party," the party's Parliamentary leader Franz Olah. Said Olah: "In the other two-party democracies, like England and the USA, first one, then the other party obtains a mandate to govern the country according to its ideas. Only we have not had this possibility. I long for this with all my heart." Aha! cried the OVP: "Therewith a responsible speaker of the Socialist Party has openly admitted the election goal of the SPO: They want to rule alone!....Protect yourself: Vote List 1, Austrian People's Party."

While this curious conflict remained the major theme of the campaign, with variations, several minor themes did appear from time to time in the score. Of these, the most important concerned basic economic policy, and here a fundamental reason for Coalition immobility was finally touched.

The dispute reaches back to the beginning of 1952 and has always centered on the Ministry of Finance, a department held by the OVP during the entire life of the Second Republic. In January, 1952, as part of an internal reorganization of the People's Party,

this ministry was taken over by Dr. Reinhard Kamitz, a specialist in financial and economic matters and a firm believer in orthodox conservative financial policies - in this instance tight money and a deflationary budget - as the solution for the country's economic problems. His firm pursuance of these policies in the face of Socialist opposition led to a dissolution of Parliament at the end of that year and elections early in 1953.

It was at this time that the People's Party was reduced, by a margin of 37,000 ballots, to second place in popular vote, retaining (as again this week) a one-mandate lead in Parliament as a result of electoral arithmetic. Despite this marginal political set-back, Dr. Kamitz continued as Minister of Finance with a series of conservative budgets. The currency had already been stabilized, in 1951-52, and in the following three years Austria began moving, with rapid strides, toward a prosperity unprecedented in this unhappy republic (DR-11). The ÖVP hailed Kamitz as the Erhard of the Austrian "miracle", and in the 1956 elections were rewarded with a 127,000 vote plurality over the Socialists, a record for the Second Republic. Thus encouraged, the conservatives in the Coalition inaugurated a second chapter of the economic policy that they now began to call "the Raab-Kamitz course".

In the 1959 campaign, it was natural that the ÖVP should again put Dr. Kamitz in the front-line of their speech-makers and urge the electorate to vote for a third installment of his policies. The Socialists answered in the name of full-employment, as they had done in 1953: this was a time, they said, for loosening the reins a little, for bigger expenditures on public works and housing in the face of the world recession. "Secure full employment" is not a conspicuously effective campaign slogan when full employment already exists. But the parts of the argument concerning public housing (still critically short in Vienna and the new industrial centers to the west) and a loosening of consumer credit restrictions undoubtedly carried more weight.

With a lack of real campaign issues - except for the Raab-Kamitz Course - all the parties began to look for handy scandals. For the Freedom Party and the Communists this was easy, for the Coalition system of dividing up the spoils of office between Blacks and Reds - "Proporz" - provided attractive targets. The Socialists badgered the ÖVP with the Haselgruber affair (DR-8). The ÖVP took advantage of the annual report of the United Austrian Iron and Steel Works (VOEST) at Linz, a nationalized industry under the control of Minister of Trade Waldbrunner (a Socialist), which was due in April, to "expose alleged misappropriation of funds and influence-peddling in nationalized industries by the Reds". While some of this mud seemed to stick, the maneuver itself backfired. The voters apparently dismissed the charges as a petty political

trick, which primarily they were, and the voters of the Linz area in particular heeded a Socialist accusation that the OVP was blackening the international reputation of Austria's proudest industry (DR-11) for personal political gain.

Then the Socialists got in the last word in the VOEST dispute by revealing the "real" reason the election had been called so abruptly: Chancellor Raab had demanded, early in March, the resignation of Trade Minister Waldbrunner from the Cabinet, and the Socialists had refused to allow it. They now pictured the entire VOEST "affair" as an attempt to smear Minister Waldbrunner.

This was really ammunition only for the critics of the Coalition system as a whole, who pointed out that the country has come to a pretty pass when the Chancellor cannot get rid of a minister in whom he has no confidence.

And so it went. Not really an earthshaking campaign. As a matter of theater, the Socialists (who had not wanted a May election) made good use of one accidental advantage: election day was only nine days after May Day, the national holiday (the only one in which even the trams and busses stop operating!) which traditionally belongs to them. Both they and the Communists turned their traditional parades and mass demonstrations into election rallies.

For the Socialists the festivities began with a torchlight march by the Socialist Youth around the Ringstrasse on the night of April 30th, ending with a rally before the Rathaus (the best place in Vienna for outdoor rallies also has a symbolic significance for the Socialists, since the city hall of "Red Vienna" has been their fortress since 1911. Then on May 1st, under cloudy skies and occasional showers, the Socialists of Vienna marched in their tens of thousands, again to the Rathausplatz, to hear more speeches.

Vienna is ideally constructed for mass demonstrations, marches, and revolutions. "One would think that old Franz Josef had anticipated the age of democracy," the Viennese say. The Ringstrasse, the famous, broad, tree-lined avenue he built girdling the Inner City along the lines of the ancient walls and moat, with its several huge adjoining squares like the Rathausplatz and the Heldenplatz, seems made for marches and rallies. As an added convenience, there is a parallel ring some two to three blocks farther out, over which traffic and trams can be sent when the Ring itself is closed for a march.

So the Viennese say: "When the A-car (a tram circling the Ring) runs over the E2 (a tram using the outer ring), there's a revolution - or the Sozi (the Socialists) are marching."

On May 1st, the Sozi march, complete with banners, red flags, and red carnations in their buttonholes. Thousands



converge from all the outlying worker's districts of this city of nearly two million: young, old, and in-between, laughing and calling to friends. There are bands - two kinds, the traditional German oom-pah band with bright brass horns, and the jazz combos of the Socialist youth organizations. As each Bezirk's delegation passes before the party hierarchy on their reviewing stand before the Rathaus, it is identified over loudspeakers, its leaders and marchers over 75 years old are identified for applause.

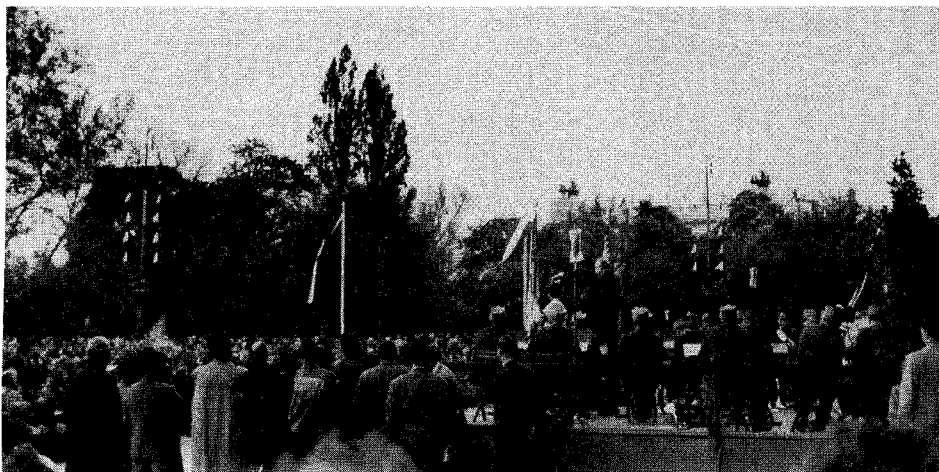
In the center of the reviewing stand stood a weary Dr. Bruno Pitterman, party leader and Vice-Chancellor of Austria, waving a great bunch of red carnations up and down and calling to each group: "Freundschaft!" (Friendship) in a voice that sounded increasingly like a tired phonograph.

The speeches that were made were political and re-hashed without inspiration the campaign slogans: the ÖVP wants an autocracy, the Raab-Kamitz course will lead to unemployment, Austria under the autocracy of the Blacks went into ruin and Nazism, Austria under the Coalition has achieved unprecedented prosperity and happiness, Socialism is the party of the People. Pitterman for Everyman, Everyman for Pitterman.

Two blocks away, in front of the Nineteenth Century neo-classical Parliament building, where the Goddess of Wisdom stands fifteen feet high, her back to the building where un-wisdom is spoken, the Communists held their rally. The marchers were pathetically few in contrast - perhaps 10,000 in all. To make their numbers look larger, they marched around only a small bit of the Ring, and padded their ranks with Czechs and Hungarians, who turned out for the occasion in colorful peasant costumes and native bands. The marchers

The marchers were easy to distinguish from the Socialists nearby: instead of carnations, they wore little red flags of enamel, with hammer, sickle, and star, in their buttonholes, they gave the Central Committee on its reviewing stand a clenched-fist salute instead of a merry wave, their standard cry was "Freiheit!" ("Freedom) instead of "Freundschaft"...and they consisted almost entirely of elderly people and children under fifteen. Missing were the massed ranks of young people in their late teens, twenties and thirties.

It was hard for the right-wing parties to top these May Day shows. The Conservatives had, first of all, no natural occasion to celebrate. But in Vienna they did their best on May 6th: the People's Party again in the Rathausplatz, the Freedom Party (with no great Vienna strength) in the Vienna Concerthouse. Wisely, neither attempted to hold a march around the Ring.



Dr. Schönbauer, with Deutschmeisters, talks of the Old Fatherland.

The ÖVP had luck in its weather, a fact in which its speakers attempted to find great significance (it had rained on the Socialists). The famous Deutschmeister Band, in their old Austrian uniforms, played Viennese waltzes and Austrian marches, a symbolic link with the past, and speeches were made.

Dr. Schönbauer, the surgeon-turned-politician, spoke of "the old, great Fatherland struck down, a rump remaining," but only he looked more to the past than to the future. This was refreshing among Austrian conservatives.

Chancellor Raab was hailed as Pater Patriae, the man who wrested his country's freedom from the Russians in 1955, and he made a speech primarily designed to demonstrate that the ÖVP is

(a) the party of Coalition cooperation par excellence and (b) the party of Austria par excellence ("We are the only party that puts the O (for Osterreich) first in our name - it is ÖVP, but SPÖ, FPÖ, KPÖ"). To the charge that he took Seipel and Dollfuss for his models and would therefore try to destroy the Coalition, he answered by noting that Seipel had in fact had a coalition (in 1922), with the Greater German Nationalists (ancestors of the FPÖ of today), and had tried to bring in the Socialists as well. But Otto Bauer's Socialists had refused. Times have changed, Raab commented: "When I ask the Sozi to come into the government after this election, as it is my intention to do, they will surely accept!" The audience thought this quite funny.

Then Dr. Kamitz, the Finance Minister, made a sober speech about what his policies have accomplished in the past six years and can accomplish in the next four. The Deutschmeisters played the national anthem and the Blacks dispersed.

Across town, in the Concert House, another sort of group assembled. Several Austrians have remarked that, seeing an unidentified political demonstration in Vienna, one can always tell by the look of the people whether the occasion is "Black" or "Red." This is curiously true. In the Concert House the audience was still a third color, quite clearly, but just how one knew this was difficult to say.

Before the audience the platform was banked with the black and red flags that had been newly designed for the Freedom Party for this election: a large misshapen black 'F' on a red field, a thoroughly German and somehow vaguely sinister color combination, especially in large quantities. Then the band assembled for the occasion began to play Viennese songs - no marches - and the sinister effect was spoiled.

The speeches were well-balanced presentations of the Party's largely unobjectionable liberal-national program (DR-7): attacks on Coalition corruption and immobility, on ÖVP timidity and clericalism and on socialist Marxism, a declaration of faith in European cooperation and the need for enlarged Austrian participation in European organizations, support for the Kamitz financial policy and opposition to any extension of Socialism. The main attack was on the Coalition, however: "The dictatorship of two parties is worse than the dictatorship of one party."

But the audience reaction was far from well-balanced. There was some applause for points made at the expense of the Coalition, but enthusiasm was saved for the occasional tribute to the Germanism of Austria. Then applause was wild, there was a stamping of feet, and one had the feeling that emotions bottled up for fourteen years were finding a small outlet. It was suddenly quite clear that the color of this assembly, neither black nor red, was brown.

"We avow our love of our Fatherland Austria, but we avow ourselves further a component of the German Folk." Said on a rising note and greeted with shouts, applause, stamping feet.

"This land was ever and ever a German land....and we love our German language, the language of Goethe and Schiller." More hurrahs, more stamping.

"Were it not for the German soldiers and what they did (in the second World War), Communism would already stand on the Rhine." Enthusiastic applause.

Afterward, on the steps and in the doorways the exits were flanked by young party workers rattling tin cups and begging: "An offering for the election campaign?" Outside a blond, huge and handsome young Aryan in a uniform of dark blue shirt, neckerchief and shorts was peddling blatantly nationalist literature.

Except for May 1st and 6th, the campaign was largely without theatricals, both in Vienna and in the provinces. The country was covered with political posters, the postal service was jammed with circulars, free newspapers, and letters—many of the last appealing specifically to housewives, since all parties were conscious of the half-million plurality of female votes), and time was allotted on the radio. In Vienna both major parties hired airplanes to tow campaign slogans over the city.

Election day provided perfect weather. Some 4.4 million Austrians went to the polls and turned in 10 thousand more valid ballots than in 1956. Since the number eligible to vote had grown by about 80 thousand in these three years, this turn-out was in fact poorer: about 95% of the voters, instead of the 1956 record of 97%, "went to the voting urn". Still, not a bad record for a free country. Even the publisher of Die Presse, loudest opponent of the Coalition, thought that the 2% fall-off in vote did not specifically mean 2% more anti-coalition voters. He blamed the decline on the fine weather, which led some city voters to pack the family car and head for Mother's Day in the country without taking time to walk around to the neighborhood schoolhouse and vote.

On the other hand, the fine weather meant an early turn-out at the polls, presumably because people were anxious to get on to more pleasant activities. A noon-hour check of voting places in my neighborhood - which is where the Communists were in the midst of losing their Basic Mandate - showed that generally two-thirds of the registered voters had already been in.

Voting in Vienna is organized with surprising efficiency. In each house a notice tells the inhabitants to which school or community building they are to go. At the entrance to the voting building, the porter checks a list: "Obere Donaustrasse 57? You vote in room 23, second floor to the left." In room 23 a passport or driver's license or other document proves that you are you, and your name is checked off a copy of the police list

of district residents. (A special notice this election warned that the four-language I.D. card issued by the Allied Powers during the occupation and still in use in 1956 was no longer good.)

This year, for the first time, the Austrians used an official, government-issued ballot. Until now, each party had printed its own ballots, and the voter had picked up whichever one he wanted from party workers standing outside the voting places. He could protect the secrecy of his ballot in this rather odd system by collecting one of each kind, then carting the unused ones home with him to destroy!

Now all four parties appear on the same, official ballot, and one checks the one desired. On the reverse side appears the list of candidates put forward by each party in the local Election District: if a party wins three mandates in this District the top three names will normally be elected. But the voter has the privilege of crossing out anyone he does not like, of re-arranging the names, or of adding a name. This complicates the counting of ballots, so that it is a day after the results are known from the front side (how many seats per party) before results are known from the back side (who will sit in them).

This year, thanks to sunshine and early voting, the front sides were counted and the last results in (from Salzburg) just at midnight on election day. At 9:30 it was already known that the Communists were out of Parliament, and I walked around to the Communist headquarters for the Leopoldstadt, just around the corner. It was dark and empty. The waitress at the workingmen's cafe next door shrugged and said: "What did they expect? Even Austrians get smarter after a while, so the Communists lose votes. We had 'em here, you know." The Leopoldstadt was in the Soviet sector of Vienna.

But so close was the race between Socialists and People's Party that only when the last results were in was the winner known. By that time the city was quiet, and everyone seemed to have gone to bed. The policeman who lives next door had turned off his radio and put away his pencil at ten o'clock. At the offices of Die Presse and Express, the reporters and their friends trotted wearily off to coffeehouses. The other coffee-drinkers looked up: "Who won?" they asked, without great interest.

As I remarked at the beginning, no great changes had been expected.

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During the election campaign, anti-coalition forces here in Austria quoted with pleasure a statement by the New York Times, with reference to the Coalition system: "Austria is no democracy, but a two-party dictatorship."

Is this really true? I no longer think so.

Gordon Shepherd, Vienna correspondent of the London Daily Telegraph, wrote three years ago: "The rule of the people consists of being able to turn a government out, as well as put it in; and, short of voting for Communist or pan-German minorities, this is precisely what the Austrian people could never do with a Coalition which had wished itself into permanence. After many years of government by extra-parliamentary Coalition committees, Austria has already moved a long way from the Western democracy whose outward form she still preserves. Internally, she is becoming a semi-corporative state with enthusiastic Socialist collaboration..."

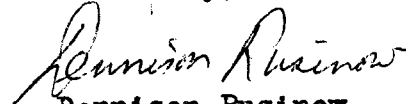
Yet this is certainly true.

The word "democracy" has probably suffered more in recent years than any other in our long-suffering political vocabulary. But it occurred to me, watching the election campaign that ended last Sunday here, that any definition of "democracy" that is to be a useful political concept must include Austria as an instance.

This much seems quite clear: as long as the two major parties here must each struggle (and each remains free to struggle) for the favor of the voters, in the eternal hope of achieving that extra, elusive five per cent that would put one of them on top, so long must they both be sensitive to wishes and needs of the voters. And even so long will each watch suspiciously and effectively for efforts on the part of the other to infringe the freedom of choice of the opposition voters.

The Austrians cannot turn their government out, as long as the parties want to live in Coalition; but they still have as much influence over what their government does as the people of any other Western nation, including the American. And that, I should have thought, was of the essence of "democracy", not of "dictatorship".

Sincerely,


Dennison Rusinow

Received New York June 3, 1959