

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR-7
The Third Force?

Vienna
II, Obere Donaustrasse 57/1/6
31 January 1959

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

If you want to call on someone in Vienna, you had better arrive before nine o'clock in the evening. At that hour the house doors of the city close, and since outer-door-to-apartment signaling devices are unknown here, later communication can only be by telephone, if one's potential host happens to have one. But while other cities, on both sides of the Atlantic, may lock their outer doors at a similar hour, the reason generally volunteered here is surely unique: "It's because of the Russians."

That the Russians have been gone three and a half years is treated as somehow an irrelevancy. Perhaps in conservative Vienna three and a half years is not long enough to turn an event into history and make it acceptable as fact.

Locked doors are annoying. The Austrian system of government, also based on this same "occupation psychosis" ("It's because of the Russians"), is dangerous and might become fatal for parliamentary democracy here. In this election year the two most important independent newspapers in the country have taken up the cry: "The Coalition must go!" But at the same time the leader of the Parliamentary opposition admitted to me privately this week: "In my opinion, the Coalition will be with us for at least two to four more years."

There are indeed powerful forces in the country that would like to maintain the Coalition indefinitely, with or without the Russians. The sincere among them are haunted by other, older Austrian ghosts: 1934, 1918, even 1883.

It is this most important fact of Austrian political life in 1959 that makes the Parliamentary Opposition, insignificant in numbers, a political factor worth analyzing. In the present Austrian Nationalrat (the Lower House of Parliament), elected in May, 1956, there are 82 members of the christian-democratic People's Party (ÖVP), 74 Socialists (SPÖ), 6 members of the Freedom Party (FPÖ), and 3 Communists. The first two provide the Coalition that has governed Austria since 1945, as I related in an earlier letter (DR-5). The remaining nine deputies are the opposition. Parliamentary debates, where democracy should have its heart and brains, are a rubber-stamping process, attended by few deputies (a complaint not unheard in other democracies), where a listless public gallery stirs only when Communist Dr. Ernst Fischer or Freedom Party leader Dr. Willfried Gredler takes the rostrum. Real decisions are made behind the closed

doors of the extra-constitutional Coalition Committee.

Austrian Communism is impotent. In Vienna, an hour's drive from the bridge at Andau, few listen when the Communist deputies issue resounding appeals for liberty, "true" neutralism, and free elections. The party membership and electorate, curiously but not surprisingly, is made up largely of elderly Viennese, people who have voted Communist ever since there was such a party and are not about to change at this late date. More Vienna conservatives. The Communist youth movement - the Free Austrian Youth (FÖJ) - has a nationwide membership of about 2,600. Only in their Parliamentary leader, Dr. Fischer, do the Communists here have a figure of note: he is the assembly's best and most literate speaker, and when he abandons the stereotypes of the Party line to count off the Coalition's sins, debate and democracy both take on unaccustomed meaning in the Parliamentary palace. But his is a lone voice, and his fellow-citizens incline to dismiss him with the comment: "He is a brilliant man. He wouldn't last long if there were a Communist government here." Adds a Nationalrat colleague: "And he knows it."

As a consequence of the manifest weaknesses of the Coalition system after nearly fourteen years of power - sterility, subornation of the civil service by the parties, corruption, reduction of parliamentary democracy to near-absurdity - and of the impotence of the Communists, the nature and prospects of the Freedom Party, as the only non-Communist opposition group, assumes added significance. Small though it is - 284,000 votes in 1956 - it already was of considerable interest as the contemporary representative of the old German Nationalist camp in Austrian politics, and for its concentration of ex-Nazis in leadership and membership. Facing an election in which the Freedom Party anticipates a considerable growth in electoral strength, one wants to know what this party really stands for, (besides opposition to the Coalition), how much Nazism really lingers in the movement, and what its role in the post-election Austria, with or without the Coalition, is likely to be.

The Pan-German Nationalist movement in Austria has always been strongest in its negative attitudes. It was against the Habsburg Empire in favor of Hohenzollern Germany, and against the First Republic in favor of Weimar Germany and, later and with increasing misgivings, in favor of Nazi Germany. Today it is against the Coalition and its alleged corruption, and is still in favor of "the German ethnic and cultural community" - but also in favor of the independent Austrian Republic.

While the movement can trace its ancestry at least to the German radicals of 1848, the founder of the German Nationalist party as a mass movement was a remarkable late Nineteenth Century Austrian, Georg von Schönerer. Schönerer was the eldest, and therefore in a sense the leader, of that group of angry young Austrians who drafted the "Linz Program" of 1883. This date and document mark a turning point in Austrian political history, the coming to Austria of modern mass movement politics. The German Liberals and Austrian Conservatives, whom Franz Josef had turned in and out of office for 35 years,

had solved nothing and by the 1880's were tired old men. A new generation, one that had not been frightened by the extremism of 1848, nor been conscious of Bismarck's exclusion of Austria from his new German Empire, had come to maturity. The Linz Program was their manifesto, German nationalist and socially radical. As Noah and his sons were the ancestors of all the races of the world, so Schönerer and his colleagues fathered all the colors, later so full of mutual hate, in Austrian politics.

Schönerer himself moved on from Linz to advocate the destruction of the Habsburg Empire and its absorption in a Greater German (and therefore Hohenzollern) Reich, to a radical anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-Marxist program. He founded the radical German Nationalist party.

Viktor Adler and Engelbert Pernerstorfer left Schönerer for a Marxist and anti-clerical internationalism in a Socialist movement largely dominated by Jews (Adler himself was Jewish, as was another close colleague of Schönerer in the Linz days, the German nationalist historian Friedjung). They founded Austrian Socialdemocracy, and Adler became a great figure in the Socialist Second International.

Karl Lueger and Robert Pattai moved on to an anti-Semitic, anti-Marxist Catholic party with mass appeal - and a program of social reform that faded increasingly into the background. **They** founded the Christian Social movement, whose political descendants are the People's Party leaders of today.

(Nazism was in a very real sense a second generation offspring of Linz. With the logic of a horrible dialectic, it reached back to Schönerer and Linz and resynthesized the three divergent streams: Lueger's appeal to the "little man" of Vienna, bits of the social program of the Second International, the violent late-romantic racial nationalism of Schönerer. And in hatred of "Judah and Rome" Nazism combined the anti-Semitism of Schönerer and Lueger with the anti-Catholicism of Schönerer and Adler. The great Austrian dramatist Franz Grillparzer, revolted by the passions of 1848, had prophesied that the forces let loose then would lead "from Humanity through Nationality to Bestiality." In Hitler the prophecy was fulfilled. The connecting chain is continuous and it passes through Linz.)

These personalities, programs, and activities of the 1880's therefore placed an indelible stamp on Austrian politics, dominated and eventually destroyed the First Republic, and are still very alive in the Second.

Schönerer's cry: "Long live the Hohenzollerns!" (in the Austrian parliament in 1902!) is significant, but dated. His proclamation that "the half-German Austrian must become a wholly German member of the new German racial Empire" has a more sinister ring for ears that listened to Hitler's speeches. While Schönerer's ideas were drawn from German writers and thinkers, it was in Vienna under his hand that the ideas acquired a characteristic Austrian demogogy and virulence that the Austrian Hitler took back, so successfully, to Germany.

Schönerer's influence may have been widespread, but his actual following in Austria was small. Most of the German Nationalists here, however eager to assert their "German-ness" and to see Austria once again a strictly German state, were also quite unwilling to see Vienna reduced to the status of a provincial capital, with no better status than Munich or Dresden, governed from Prussian Protestant Berlin. Traditionally the Party drew much of its strength from the German bureaucrats of the Empire (their nationalism whetted by pressure of the Slav peoples of the Empire for a larger share of bureaucratic posts), and these men were really unlikely to opt for the end of the Empire, when the cards were down, no matter how logical a conclusion to their theoretical beliefs this might be. Thus they, too, were reduced to being "half German Austrians."

In all three parties in the first years after 1918, the moderates were in control. The Nationalists might dream of Anschluss, but the firm Allied veto put the dream out of reach. Socialists might dream of the Socialist Utopia, but the terror and brutality of Soviet Communism made them cautious, and even when Soviet Republics were established in Bavaria and Hungary, the Austrian Socialists, caught between, kept their heads. The Christian Socials might dream of a Restoration, but the Habsburgs lay under a ban enforced by both the Allies and the Little Entente.

In these circumstances the moderate German Nationalists were able to enter a coalition with the Christian Socials that lasted ten years. All three parties looked upon the Republic as provisional. Meanwhile they compromised with the times (compromise has always been a Viennese strongpoint), and the Republic functioned despite itself. The German Nationalists rationalized their support of the Republic by talking of putting the house in order in preparation for its "return" to the German community. Thus rationalizing, they supplied the Republic with one of its most worthy, sincere and successful Chancellors, Dr. Johann Schober, who had been the Emperor's Vienna police president.

Meanwhile, each party prepared for the future. Seipel's Christian Socials looked forward to a spiritual (if not physical) restoration of some sort of Holy Roman Empire with, if possible, the Habsburgs again at its head. Otto Bauer's Socialists dreamed of Utopia and turned to making "Red Vienna" into a model of Socialist welfare administration that would be copied throughout Europe. The Nationalists dreamed of a different sort of Holy Roman Empire, with Berlin its Rome and Vienna its Athens.

This exaggerated conception of Austria as the "navel of the World", in some sense an understandable compensation for the psychological impact of the collapse of 1918, made Austrian politics seem bigger than life, of worldshaking importance. Conservative historians in Vienna today maintain that this view was the most important reason why Austrian politics became increasingly embittered, why the radical wings of each party came increasingly into control, and why Austria's fledgling democracy collapsed in bloodshed in 1934. It was because the politicians believed that far more than life in a tiny republic was at stake.

As with many historical vogues, the importance in this theory is not that it may be true, but that it is believed.

For the German Nationalist party, the conflict was fatal. Forced to declare their hands at last, the moderate Nationalists were absorbed by the Heimwehr, which chose the road of "Austro-Fascist" violence and corporatism to preserve the country from Nazi violence, while the extreme Nationalists were absorbed by the Austrian Nazis.

From 1934 until 1949 there was no German Nationalist Party in Austria.

Shortly after the end of the war the nucleus of non-Communist opposition to the Black-Red Coalition began to gather around a publication known as Berichte und Informationen (Reports and Information), whose contributors actually included Dr. Toncic, a People's Party leader who may well be Austria's next foreign minister. The publication's intention was to provide a sounding board for criticism of the government and to become a center for intellectual dissatisfaction with the regime. I have been told by some older students in Vienna that the American and French occupation authorities participated in the founding of the group, eager to see the establishment of a "third force" in Austrian politics and also seeking an organization that would sponsor in Austria the idea of Western European Union. (Today, alone among the parties, the Freedom Party includes in its program a demand for greatly enlarged Austrian participation in Western European affairs.) The FPÖ leaders here will not confirm this story - perhaps it is better not to have any occupation force as a step-father to a nationalist party - but confined themselves to saying: "The United States was interested."

By the winter of 1948-49 Berichte und Informationen had over 10,000 addresses in its files, "a useful thing for people who want to organize a political party," says one of the early members. With the help of this mailing list the Union of Independents (VdU) was founded in time to fight the election of October, 1949. The new party emerged with almost half a million votes out of 4.2 million cast, and 16 seats out of the 165 in the Nationalrat. In the following seven years the party passed rapidly through weakness to disintegration, and in the spring of 1956, just six weeks before the last elections, was reorganized as the Austrian Freedom Party. At that time, as already noted, they polled little more than half the VdU's 1949 vote and were reduced to six seats

These elections results are, however, no fair measure of the new party's strength. Dr. Gredler was undoubtedly right when he told me: "Those six seats belonged to the VdU, not to the FPÖ. There had been no time to reorganize." He added, with some bitterness, that at the time the new party was formed he had been promised by the Coalition leaders that the election would not be called for at least six months.

The success of the VdU in 1949 and its rapid subsequent eclipse were both the result of its mongrel nature and of temporary electoral factors. The organization, basically negative in nature, had

brought together all sorts of dissident groups: unregenerate Pan-German Nationalists, defiantly determined to speak up for German culture and ethnic links even if the Anschluss was permanently discredited; anti-clerical conservatives from the provinces unable to stomach the church connections of the People's Party; monarchists who felt betrayed by the People's Party's firm defense of the Republic; many people already disturbed by the drift of the Coalition into lethargy and corruption.

But most significant of all, when it came to the vote, were the ex-Nazis, who had been temporarily disenfranchised in 1945. (Almost a million more votes were cast in 1949 than in 1945, and most of the VdU's half million presumably came from this number.) The majority of these had joined the NSDAP during the Anschluss years, halfheartedly at best, out of fear or opportunism or to protect their jobs (non-Nazis in Austria's ubiquitous bureaucracy invariably lost their positions, as thousands of German Nazis poured into the Ostmark). The VdU, with a number of well-known Nazis in its leadership, declared bluntly that this compromise had been respectable, and the disenfranchised flocked to its standard in protest against their second-class citizenship. But the Austrian government also recognized the desirability of bringing this sizeable group back into the democratic fold. As the sometime Nazis were pardoned and rehabilitated during the following years, the VdU, which had never broadened its base, lost its appeal to them and collapsed.

The formation of the FPÖ represented, therefore, more than a change of name: it was the real return to the arena of the third traditional camp in Austrian politics.

Through reading the party's literature and talks with some of its supporters and opponents, all against the background of the history of the movement, I have been attempting to find out what the German Nationalists really stand for in Austria today. Most useful in this effort have been two long interviews with Dr. Gredler, the Parliamentary leader of the FPÖ and its best-known spokesman in the nation at large. I first met him in 1953, when he was serving his first term in the Nationalrat under the aegis of VdU. Since then he has grown in self-confidence, and in stature within his party and in the country. He represents the old German Liberal tradition in the Nationalist camp. I have heard it said that he would really rather be in the People's Party. Candour is one of his virtues, but he is not candid enough to admit to that.

Dr. Gredler, like his party program, proclaims emphatically that the Anschluss idea is really dead, that "Austria as a republic is a fact." He adds: "We are more Germanophil." Foreign observers get confused about this distinction, he says, because they overlook a difference in meaning between the English or French word "nation" and the German word "Nation", which he defines as an ethnic group. "We used to say 'race', but it's better not to mention a 'race question' now!" So, while there is an "Austrian nation" or a "nation autrichienne", there is no "Österreichische Nation", but only an "Österreichischer Staat".

As an exercise in semantics, I found this a bit dubious, and took a look at the official party program: "We affirm the separate statehood of Austria and adhere to a belief in the German ethnic (Volks-) and cultural community, and stand for the close unity of the free peoples and states of Europe on the basis of full and equal justice and self determination." It is the nearest thing to a sinister statement in a carefully and nobly phrased platform. Perhaps because "self-determination" used to mean Anschluss in the mouths of the Nationalists.

The rest of the program suggests an Eisenhower-like "advanced conservatism" in economics (on the basis of which the party would like to be considered in the center of the political spectrum, between Freedom Party and Socialists, rather than on the rightwing), a reduction of Austrian neutrality in the Cold War to the barest military neutrality required by the State Treaty, and a broader participation in common Western European enterprises. There is a characteristic declaration of opposition to thinking "in class and group interest" terms, and a gesture of support for national and religious tolerance.

The old German party was a party of bureaucrats and haute bourgeois. "Now our support comes from white-collar employees, some workers and farmers," Dr. Gredler said. (The Proporz system of doling out bureaucratic jobs on the basis of Coalition party strengths has naturally turned the bureaucracy into an exclusively coalition domain.) Electoral charts show the party's greatest strength in Salzburg (always pro-German and the center of Nazi strength) and Carinthia (the border province on the way to Slavdom, with a consequent tendency to nationalism), weakest in Lower Austria (pro-clerical Catholic peasantry, a People's Party stronghold) and in Red Vienna. Were these not precisely the classes and geographic areas in which Nazism had had its appeal? Dr. Gredler looked surprised. "No one has said that before," he said. I looked surprised. He thought a bit: "That could be an unfriendly statement, but it is true." Then he added: "But it is an entirely different program."

This was largely true. But it was difficult to see in just what positive aspects the formal program differed from that of the People's Party. Dr. Gredler began to look for differences. The FPÖ would like to see Austria join the Common Market, not just the moribund European Free Trade Area, which is what Coalition foreign policy seeks to do (this is consistent with the FPÖ's loose construction of Austria's treaty-bound neutrality). The FPÖ does not recognize the legality of the 1934 Concordat with the Holy See, signed by the Dollfuss government after its coup d'etat, and a majority of the FPÖ leadership is disinclined to see a new Concordat negotiated - although Dr. Gredler personally would favor one ("many non-Catholic states have Concordats"). The party is opposed to state support of Catholic schools, although in favor of religious instruction in the public schools. On both these religious issues they are siding with the Socialists against the People's Party, and it is worth remembering that the German Party's support in the western provinces has always come from the anti-clerical (although Catholic) peasants of the alpine valleys.

Then Dr. Gredler cited an odd difference of opinion over postage

stamps. The FPÖ, he said, had wanted the Coalition to enter a postal union with the German Federal Republic, abolishing separate Austrian stamps. This would in no way compromise Austrian statehood, he said. "I believe we had common postage stamps at one other period before the Anschluss," he added a little vaguely. The proposal was turned down, he said, because the post office complained it would lose too much money if only inland rates were charged on the large volume of mail going across the northwestern border! Again I felt the ground tremble beneath Austria's "state consciousness".

If the FPÖ emerges from the 1959 elections with only its present representation, and if the Coalition survives into another term, all of this will remain rather academic, for the Freedom Party's importance will continue to be negative and small. The Coalition's prospects are not yet bad. After sounding through the autumn as though they were about to go separate ways, the People's Party and the Socialists are now making Coalition-like noises again. Last week Vice-Chancellor Dr. Pitterman, the number one Socialist in the government, came out strongly in favor of the continuance of the present system. This should be music to FPÖ ears. If both government parties fight the election on a clear-cut coalition platform, the Freedom Party should have a free run after embittered anti-coalition votes, with the blank ballot as its only serious competition. Publically committed to wanting an end to the Coalition, the FPÖ leaders have trouble hiding their real eagerness that the system should continue, and with it their monopoly of non-Communist opposition.

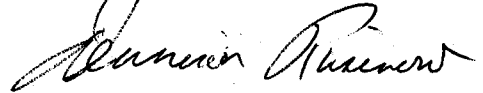
The exceptions are those - probably including Dr. Gredler - who are even more eager to hold office themselves. These, too, would like to see the FPÖ grow in strength, but with the hope that they will have to be invited into coalition with either or both of the major parties. The more obvious choice is the People's Party, and an ÖVP-FPÖ combination was mooted after the last election. "But it is not impossible," said Dr. Gredler, "that we shall form a coalition with the Socialists one day in the next ten years." He smiled: "When you see the big bankers and business men greeting me very respectfully on the street, you will know we have formed that coalition. Then we will be their hope and representatives in a Socialist administration, and they will have to come to us."

"The purpose of politics, after all, is power," he had said earlier - an honest statement more often found in textbooks than in the mouths of politicians.

The only alternative to a continued coalition of one of these sorts would be the development of a straightforward two-party system, with People's Party and Socialists alternating in office. But as long as the present delicate balance continues (and it has survived forty turbulent years!) and the Communists and Nationalists exist as splinter parties, it is impossible for either major party to command a viable majority by itself.

The Freedom Party is therefore not far wrong in anticipating a key position for itself, in government or in opposition, if it only gains a little strength. The basic stalemate will continue. Opponents of the present system will then have to decide whether they would rather try to clean up and enliven the existing combination, or see the heirs of the Pan-German Nationalists in office.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

Received New York February 16, 1959