

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WWU - 30
AUSTRIA III: OTHER VOICES

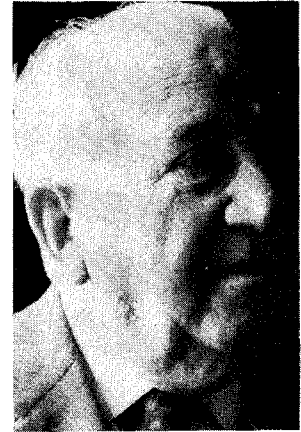
Hotel Erzherzog Rainer,
Wiedner Hauptstrasse, Vienna.
September 11, 1959.

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

This is my third and final letter to you from Austria. I know it's a small country and I am aware I have been here for only six days. But everybody in Austria seems to like to talk. And I like to listen. Perhaps you would too.

Oskar Helmer, an old time Socialist and union organizer, was Austrian Minister of the Interior from the end of the war in 1945 until this year when he retired, in his 'seventies, to the respectability of the presidency of the Osterreichshe Landesbank. For his 14 years in the Cabinet, Helmer was literally the front line between Austria and her Russian Occupier. I had been told that he showed the flag at all times -- taking great personal risks, was a tough bargainer and gained the respect of all political parties for his performance. I was thrown off guard a bit to find this union boss-turned-bank president full of winks, laughter and jokes on himself.



"McCarthy of Austria"

I started right off by asking Helmer about the subject which intrigued me most: What is it like to be an occupied people dealing with the Russians?

"It was a hard time. They threatened me and attacked me personally, and often in the early years I went to the Imperial Hotel (Russian Occupation headquarters here in Vienna) and was not sure that they would let me out again. But they never did anything to me actually and when there was a table with vodka and caviar I knew that that day they would be friendly. My special privilege was that I never had to speak to the Russians as a diplomat. With the Russians you must speak clearly so that they understand you and when they commit an injustice, make it plain to them. That they respect. As soon as you show you are afraid it is particularly bad. Their distrust increases. They are so distrustful that as soon as I would move this package of cigarettes on the table they would ask me why did I do it? You can have coexistence with the Russians as long as you speak the truth. I always thought it was my task to arouse resistance and the important thing was that our population should not simply give in and fall asleep. I have always said that one must not get accustomed to injustice. When Mikhoyan came here he called Helmer the 'McCarthy of Austria' -- because everybody knows that on the question of communism I was rather intransigent. But when the Russians left, a very important General told me: 'With you at least we knew what you wanted. You were our enemy but we respected you.'"

What about Hungary? Did you realize when you decided to take in

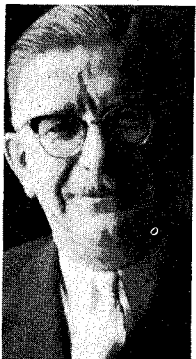
refugees that you might bring down the house and be reoccupied for turning "un-neutral" right after your independence and declaration of neutrality?

"We were worried. There was the definite possibility that the Russians might be annoyed about it. The Hungarian Revolution brought the Russians right to our border with their tanks and had they decided not to respect our borders we could not have done anything about it. But they stopped at our red flag markers (which Austria put there to let the refugees know when they were safely on Austrian soil). The Russians themselves had difficulty keeping abreast of the situation. And actually the Russians didn't criticize us. The Communist press attacked us with veiled threats of what the Russians might do if they got very upset. The Austrian Government was the first to appeal to the Russians to stop the shedding of blood on the Austrian border. Actually the first to come were those who had hunted the democrats. And yet we gave them asylum, just as we did for the hunted later. We must grant asylum to whoever comes and we can't limit it to any one group."

Didn't you and your Government have to make an initial decision when faced with the refugees at your door? "No. Just the 'How?' was the question, not the 'If?'" (I later heard Helmer himself had crossed the border into Hungary in order to better appraise the situation. This was a real risk, had the Russians ever caught him.)

How did you find the various occupying powers compared? "The major difficulty with the Russians was that they never came up with things at the top level. They tried to come up from underneath. The Russians' main attempt was to subvert the police, and they never even tried to veil this. For us it was necessary to keep the Executive intact or else Austria would become divided. With the Russians we have never made a compromise. With the French, there were some compromises we didn't like. What was the worst was their dismantling all of the factories. And they always played the absolute overlords. With the Americans, there was always the Negroes. At the beginning of the Occupation, both the Americans and the French used Negro troops in some little villages and that often from the start was considered a kind of punishment for us."

How did the American Occupiers compare with the Russians who you say preferred dealing under the table? "The Americans were a bit more perfumed on this." Helmer also took an indirect slap at the U.S. in referring to the Hungarian refugees: "We liked the Hungarians to come to Austria. It is essential to survival for us because it prevents inbreeding." And then, to make his point clear, he said he failed to understand the "bureacracy" and "McCarthyism" involved in U.S. immigration laws. I neglected to ask Helmer about Austria's fourth occupying power, Britain.



Dr. Leopold Figl (pronounced "feegel") was Austria's Chancellor from 1945 until 1953, and her Foreign Minister until the election upset this May when he was forced to step aside as a People's Party man in favor of the Socialist, Kreisky. Now Figl is President of the National Assembly, the second ranking (after the President) post in Austria, but a post where the duties are in good measure ceremonial. Austrians consider it very important that you be given a geneological chart before each introduction. Figl's family, it seems, were "South Austrian peasants, winegrowers." I didn't realize the two terms were synonymous. Though Figl did seem to have a good healthy wine country glow in his cheeks. I hesitated to guess his age because he struck me as the sort of man who will be carried out looking in the pink of health.

FIGL

I had the feeling that Figl was every inch the gracious politician with me, being careful to say only the right things. For instance, when I asked him about the origin of Austria's neutrality (he was a member of the negotiating team which went to Moscow in March, 1955), he replied: "We were the origin. We are an independent country and we did not ask the Occupying Powers for permission." And getting into the UN? "We became members of our own free will and the Four Big Powers agreed that our membership would not influence our neutrality." What do you do on critical UN votes? "It all depends on the subject. Mostly we vote with the West. We never vote with the East. Sometimes we abstain. In 1957, we voted against Red China's entry. In 1958, we abstained. And the abstaining was criticized by the U.S. and by the Russians. It was the right neutral position." How did you happen to change your vote from 1957 to 1958? "There must be some reality in politics." How difficult is it to be neutral? "You can be sure the Austrian neutrality is only a military one. In other things we stand with the West. Our neutrality is not a political neutrality, nor an ideological one. We are still a member of the Western culture. We still have the standard for the democratic ideas of the West and for the independence and freedom of the individual. But we feel we are an Ambassador of the Free World to the East, and we believe we can influence the Eastern people (toward) Western democracy." Is Austria interested in a neutral bloc? "No, because the neutrality of countries differs. And it would be against the meaning of neutrality if on the one side we withheld from the big blocs and on the other side helped build another bloc." And what about Tito's urging for a neutral grouping? "We would never join."

I had a little difficulty gaining an appointment with Franz Grubhofer. First, a Foreign Ministry press official irritatingly asked: "Where did you get his name? Why do you want to see him?" Grubhofer is Interior State Secretary and as such the People's (Conservative) Party watchdog over the Socialist Interior Minister. As such, he sits in the Cabinet. He comes from the province of Vorarlberg, which is nearest the Swiss border, an area which is outspokenly in favor of federalism as well as that other Swiss characteristic, neutral fundamentalism. I sought out Grubhofer because I had been told he represented the far right wing of Austrian neutrality, and also that he had sort of unnerved everybody not too long ago by trying to push through a neutrality law which would establish rules of behavior for press and individuals. Grubhofer's proposal was smothered by the Government before it got to Parliament.



GRUBHOFER

Well, this bustling, perhaps timid, certainly suspicious, little man succeeded in throwing me into a dead halt with his very first remark, as related through an interpreter: "He asks if you are really working for your newspaper, or for your Government?" Knowing how righteous The Washington Post is in preserving its independence of Government in order to criticize freely, I tried to set the Austrian Interior Department straight as quickly as I could.

What about your proposal, Herr Grubhofer? "The Austrian Neutrality Law says we will be neutral with all the means at our disposal and I do not think (refraining from) military alliances is all the means at our disposal. The population and press are not bound so there can be no ideological neutrality." (The National Assembly, in a resolution in late 1955, declared specifically that neutrality should not restrict a citizens' basic rights and liberties.) Should there be ideological neutrality in Austria? "No. But if the Federal Government

is obliged to support neutrality it can do this only with the support of the people. So the population must be accustomed to this new policy. It can be achieved if the press and the people are made aware of their responsibilities. In Switzerland, where freedom is prized, newspapers write whatever they decide. But in more serious situations the Swiss citizen knows precisely how far he can go. The Swiss take neutrality more seriously. During the Hungarian crisis, the Austrian newspapers got out of hand. Unofficial attempts were made to tell them to slow down. But they were made too late and were not permanent. Neutrality needs a strong mind. People who are indifferent will immediately be assimilated by whoever is stronger than they are. People who are nationalistic or radical present difficulties. The political adventurer is also a danger to neutrality."

What is your proposal, Herr Grubhofer? "I think we should enumerate a few situations which would violate neutrality, such as giving offense to foreign heads of government, or with regard to foreign intelligence services. The big idea is that one should be careful as regards foreign countries or governments. But the big question is how can that be formulated without interfering with basic rights? I know the difficulties of legal forms and would prefer that the people themselves be made aware of the situation and exercise self restraint. No proposal has been worked out yet. But there are consultations still going on and I think Parliament is now more in favor of it than it was."

From the little I picked up, I suspect Grubhofer is more optimistic over selling his bill than he has reason to be. The Austrian press, and a good many Government officials, want the thing buried deep. But anyway, I think I did come away from Grubhofer persuaded he has the sincerity of a neutral fundamentalist, rather than the urge to control of a fascistic Papa-Knows-Bester.

I gathered a little more of the relationship among Government, Press and Neutrality from Dr. Hugo Portisch, the 32-year-old, very self-assured editor of Die Neue Kurier. The Kurier was formerly the U.S. Occupation paper, then shifted into private hands (the Russian paper abdicated the field to the official Communist Party organ) and is still considered the leading pro-West publication in Austria. Its circulation is also the largest, although its quality is something else again.



Portisch said he ran up against censorship (he didn't use this term) in 1955 when as a radio commentator for the Austrian Broadcasting System he used "very hard criticism" in pointing out the discrepancies between Khrushchev's and Molotov's promises at the Geneva Summit and Foreign Ministers' meetings in 1955. "The Communist paper criticized and the Austrian Broadcasting System, under State control, discontinued my on-the-spot accounts, explaining they 'had better things coming in.'" Today, Portisch says that ABS differentiates between the government and ideology, refraining from a hard attack against the Soviet Union, but pulling no punches in its criticism of communism. "Even we," Editor Portisch said, "make a small differentiation. We do not say, 'That Bloody Khrushchev.' We do say, 'Prime Minister Khrushchev, who did this and that...' But as for the man who crushed the Hungarian Revolt, he is still a 'Bloody Terrorist.'" PORTISCH

As for the recent Communist Youth Festival, Portisch said all Vienna papers agreed to treat it with complete silence so as to avoid being

criticized for unneutral reporting. Portisch, however, wrote an advance editorial: "Government is guilty to let the Communist Youth Festival come to this country." He added: "Today each paper can print what it wants."

During the Hungarian Revolt apparently neither Press nor Government were so circumspect. "That time the Austrians really found out how far their neutrality can go," Portisch said. "People here immediately formed columns of hundreds of cars going to Budapest with little gifts that they had. The Kurier sent carloads of fuel. It was understood that Hungary would become neutral, as we are. Many M.P.s were caught by the Russians in Budapest trying to negotiate (I have no corroboration of this) and one of our Ministers (Helmer) was there too. At the last moment we decided to cut him out of the newsreels. And when the Russians crushed the revolt we crushed all the Communist Party cells here in Vienna and went to the Soviet Embassy to demonstrate. The Russians never said, 'We will crush you too,' although the Russian Ambassador told the Government he considered it was a breach of neutrality. (This is not the explanation I got from ex-Interior Minister Helmer.) The Austrian Government said if the Austrians crossed into Hungary they did so as a private action. Mikhoian asked for a visit here and made it clear they were very unhappy. Now our relations with Russia are back to normal. But we still have no diplomatic relations with Hungary."

Incidentally, Austria persuaded Hungary to take down the barbed wire and remove her border landmines just three weeks before the revolt began.

Although both Portisch and his paper are so outspokenly pro-West and pro-U.S., I thought it would be interesting to see if he has any gripes vis-a-vis Uncle Sam. He had, and has: "For years after the American Occupation, the Embassy here acted as if they were still occupying us. Or if we had a cartoon they didn't like they phoned and complained. The Russians never did that. Things are very good that way now. But I have the feeling that America just doesn't know what's going on in Central Europe. During Hungary, Austria proposed that a five-man international commission be sent in during the first few days so as to learn the facts. The U.S. agreed and then, after all the other members had agreed too, backed out. And as for the oil claims settlement, America closed down the Marshall Plan counterpart account as a revenge for our not settling. We need the money. We have counted on it in our budget and it's not given us. The Socialists are for nationalizing. But if the oil fields are nationalized that would be a terrible amount of money (for compensating the West). The People's (Conservative) Party is for using a combine with American experience. The Socialists are afraid and say, 'No.' As long as they say 'No' we lack the necessary unanimous decision."

I heard more about the oil beef from Dr. Friedrich Scheu, foreign affairs editor of the Socialist Party organ, Arbeiter Zeitung. Scheu worked in England for a good many years and apparently is an old-line Socialist. As a matter of fact, he lost no time in trying to arrange a date between his eligible daughter, who works full time for the Party, and my managing editor's oldest son, who was along with me for the interview.

Said Scheu: "For 1½ years the Americans have been holding up these Marshall Plan counterpart funds. They don't admit it's part of the oil, but we know it's part of the oil. They



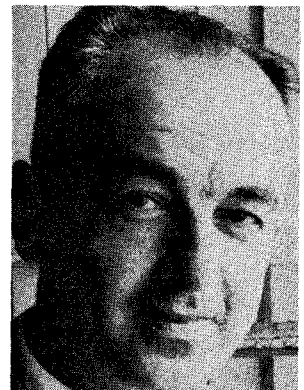
"..India, we are not close to"

want oil wells and new fields, or an operating agreement, or refineries, or money. (I don't know why I have thrown this at you undigested. I can't make any sense out of it either.) This Spring, the Austrians said they would accept it, and later decided on an alternative. But that is still not finalized." What complicates everything, according to Scheu, is the fact that the British and Americans refused to sign the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 until they had received some promise of compensation for their oil companies. The "Wien Memorandum," a secret agreement, was then made by the same quartet which had gone to Moscow for the original negotiations, the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Foreign Minister and State Secretary (at that time, Kreisky). Then the Russians got hold of the agreement and published it, causing many political blushes.

Looking back over the origins of Austria's neutrality, Scheu said, "The Russians concluded the presence of the NATO troops in the Western part of the country was a greater disadvantage to them than the presence of their own troops in the Eastern part. At the same time they wanted to prove their coexistence, and they had given up the hope of making Austria communist...Now the story today that the Austrian Government is afraid and it's Russian pressure that makes Austria do things is not true at all. At the same time, it is obvious that the American forces and NATO are our guarantee and we don't want to make too many other countries neutral like us. As for any neutral 'bloc,' we are not close to Tito and India, we are not close to at all. We think their neutralism favors the East. We have cooperation -- economic and military exchanges -- with Sweden and Switzerland. And we are not frightened as the Finns. They have to be 10 times more careful. (This constant harping on "We're not like Finland" that I've run into. Maybe it's caused by the current visit of the Finnish Prime Minister.) In the UN, our delegation tries on the one hand to be neutral, and on the other to be Western."

What about the Communist Youth Festival which your paper, along with the others in Austria, decided to boycott? "The Cabinet was split. The faction won which said Austria could have more effect on the Russians than the Russians on Austria. The Russians thought Vienna would be a place where they should have it. They didn't realize what a flop it would be. And we had no mention in the Austrian press because we didn't want to make propaganda."

Dr. Otto Schulmeister is foreign affairs editor of *Die Presse*, Austria's best newspaper and published by Fritz Molden, a man who at one time was married to Allan Dulles' daughter (I am getting into that Austrian habit of dishing up a bit of geneology with each introduction). But we're talking about Schulmeister, and he is also editor of *Wort und Wahrheit* ("Word and Truth"), a Catholic monthly whose offices are in the personal apartment of Emperor Franz in the oldest section of Vienna's Hofburg Palace. I am particularly indebted to Schulmeister, not only for his good Viennese coffee on the Emperor's old table (Hofburg offices are often furnished with the original), but because he offered -- and made good -- on getting me an appointment with his good friend, Foreign Minister Kreisky.



SCHULMEISTER

Schulmeister, like Scheu, had something to say about the Youth Festival: "It was a really vivid picture of our neutrality. We didn't help and we didn't do anything against it. It was the first Youth

Festival outside the Iron Curtain and it was a big mistake because nobody really came and paid any attention. Austria gave permission to hold the Festival, but they couldn't force the Austrian people and newspapers to pay any notice of it."

And on neutrality, Schulmeister declared: "We've got a military neutrality. As far as politics are concerned, we belong to the West. The Russians try to make it an ideological neutrality, but we don't want that. But we do want neutrality. We don't want to move one step from that. It is only because of the special circumstances prevailing in this country that we could have this treaty and this neutrality. And as long as the American troops are in Munich we are all right. The Russians wanted to take a postwar interest in the central government but they never thought the Communist Party would lose so many votes (down from 5.5 per cent of the total vote in 1945 to 3.3 per cent in last May's election, which also cost them the loss of their three remaining seats in the National Assembly). The Russians thought they would gain more than they lost by the peace treaty, but it was a miscalculation. And now we take it with a sense of humor."

I suppose that's what has impelled me to carry on at such length in these Austrian letters. Unlike Switzerland's classic neutrality, neighboring Austria is pragmatic in her fence straddling. She is neutral because she has to be to exist between East and West. But she makes no secret of her Western origin and leanings, of her love for Maria Theresia and Franz Josef and the pony-pulled bass drum of the Old Austrian Band. And in today's world of terrible tensions, little Austria does have a sense of humor.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Warren W. Unna', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Warren W. Unna

Received New York October 23, 1959