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Vienna. Problem Child of Europe.

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V I E N N A

PROBLEM CHILD OF EUROPE

By K l a u s M a n n

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"Conditions in Germany are serious but not hopeless; conditions in Austria are hopeless but not serious."

This melancholy crack, a characteristic sample of Austrian self-irony, was often quoted by Viennese political commentators during the period between the two world wars. It described with flippant accuracy an at once curious and alarming state of affairs. The Austria that emerged from World War I was indeed in a hopeless position; yet the Austrians managed to muddle along, without ever taking their own problems quite seriously.

A tiny country with a disproportionately large capital, the young Austrian republic appeared derelict, forlorn, out of place in the European setup as defined by the peace treaties of St. Germain and Versailles, in 1919. Many Austrians -- especially the Social Democrats, then representing the nation's most powerful political body -- would have liked to join the Reich; but that was out of the question. On the other hand, there was no help or encouragement -- neither moral nor economic -- from any other side. Austria remained ~~helpless~~ isolated.

When Hitler came to power in Berlin, progressive elements in Vienna lost interest in the "anschluss" -- now a danger, from

their point of view, rather than a temptation. But the ^{same} democracies who had once prevented Austria from joining ~~a democratic Reich~~ ^(the Weimar Republic, now), failed in protecting her against Nazi aggression. The only defender of Austrian independence was il Duce in Rome, who in the end betrayed his protégé for the sake of German-Italian friendship.

No doubt, millions of Austrians were only too pleased when Hitler enforced the "anschluss;" but there were other millions bitterly opposed to Greater Germany. We must not forget that the Nazis marched into Austria in order to prevent the plebiscite ordered by Chancellor Schuschnigg, and which might have revealed the true feelings of the Austrian people. As for the democracies who tolerated the Nazi coup, they remembered a few years later that Austria did not really belong to the Reich and that it was in the interest of the Allied cause to restore the country's national independence.

As far back as February, 1942, Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister, found cordial and moving words in describing Austria as "the first victim of the Nazis." In the same speech he praised eloquently the charm and splendor of Vienna, and promised, furthermore, that the British people would help in delivering that unfortunate capital from "the Prussian yoke."

This promise was reaffirmed, also in the name of the United States and the Soviet Union, when the Foreign Ministers of the three great powers met at Moscow, in the fall of 1943. At the same time, however, the Allied statesmen emphasized that Austria was to be held responsible for her participation in the war on the side of Nazi Germany. The announcement culminated in an appeal to the Austrian people to contribute actively to their own liberation, as the country's status in the postwar world would depend on their attitude during the final phase of the fight against Hitlerism.

Of course, it is difficult to decide whether, or to what extent, the

Austrians have actually contributed to the liberation of their native soil. But even presuming that their effort has fallen short of what might have been expected -- the question remains: Is Austria a liberated country, or is she to be regarded as a defeated enemy? It is this very question by which the Austrians seem to be constantly puzzled and intrigued. They don't know where they stand. On the one hand, authoritative Allied spokesmen insist that Germany had no right to annex Austria; on the other hand, ^{the} Austrians are being treated as though there were no difference between them and the Germans.

As long as the non-fraternization policy prevailed in the occupied Reich, it was also maintained in "liberated" Austria. If GIs are not allowed to marry German fraeuleins -- marriages with Austrian girls are equally frowned upon. People in Vienna seem to feel, not without bitterness, that their German "brothers" are even better off, in certain respects, than the Austrians. ~~It is current gossip here that the "Piefkes" (as the Austrians nickname the Prussians) have really plenty to eat, while the Viennese are starving.~~

Clearly, the food situation in ^{this} ~~the~~ Austrian capital is reaching a critical point. The average daily calorie ration is now only 900, although a minimum of 1,250 (originally 1,550) calories has been guaranteed by the Allied Control Council. About 300,000 tons of food supplies will have to be imported before the end of the summer to keep up even this low ration scale until the next harvest. The Viennese are being told that considerable quantities of UNRRA food are on the way from the U.S. and Argentina. For the time being, however, conditions are pretty grim.

If it's not yet starvation, it is certainly not far from it. There are U.S. Weighing Stations scattered throughout the American-occupied districts. According to official reports, these surveys indicate that

in general the weight standards of the various age groups have remained fair, "except among children 6-18 years of age and older people." That may be so; but the death rate in Vienna increases alarmingly, and most of the people you meet have that hollow-eyed, tired look -- the look of the hungry.

Herbert Hoover's visit to Vienna aroused a good deal of hope and curiosity among the undernourished natives. Would the ex-President live up to his Santa Claus-like reputation? -- bringing along in his private plane billions of ~~tin~~ canned calories? Was prosperity around the corner?

I attended his press conference at the fashionable Bristol Hotel, now the billet of U.S. senior officers and distinguished visitors. Seated between General Clark and the General's political advisor, Mr. Erhardt, the former boss of the United States told us in a dry, matter-of-fact way that the Austrians don't have enough to eat, and that the Americans will have to do something about it. There will be no rationing in the U.S., he said, but the measures to be applied will prove more stringent and more effective, in Mr. Hoover's opinion, than any rationing could possibly be. Mr. Hoover failed to explain just what kind of measures he had in mind. In any case, he promised that there will be help from Uncle Sam; all the Viennese journals (and there are plenty of them!) announced the news in bold, joyful headlines.

The people of Vienna certainly needed some kind of psychological lift; they don't have much fun, these days. No wine, no Schnitzel, Strudel, or Gulasch -- not even on the Black Market! Most of their beloved café houses have been requisitioned, and even those still at the disposal of the population open their doors just for a few hours each day, to serve some dubious concoction hardly resembling the delicious Viennese coffee of the good old days. As for Vienna's celebrated amusement area, the "Prater," it happens to be one of the city's most cruelly

beaten spots. Only one colossal ferry wheel managed to survive the general destruction -- a ghostly reminder of a happier past.

It is true, anyone familiar with the ruined cities of Germany will find Vienna comparatively well-preserved. But only few people here have had the opportunity to see what happened to Berlin, Cologne, Munich, Hamburg and Dresden. Besides, one damaged building in Vienna means more of a loss, ^{cultural} ~~from the~~ Viennese point of view, than hundreds of destroyed German towns. ^{But} The Viennese seem to resent it bitterly that some of their city's most illustrious landmarks have been touched by irreverent Allied bombs. Why, even St. Stephen's Cathedral, most venerable shrine to every Austrian, has not been spared partial destruction! A nation-wide ~~donation~~ money drive is under way to finance the reconstruction of the ^{damaged} ~~roof~~ roof, but it may take years before dear old "Steffl" will be quite the same again...

There can be no doubt that Vienna is full of disgruntled, embittered people and that the general discontentment creates an atmosphere propitious for the machinations of pro-Nazi, reactionary elements. Naturally, not all the Austrian Hitlerites have changed their minds overnight and have become reliable democrats. A Viennese woman I know -- a trustworthy anti-Fascist and former member of the Underground -- told me that she is practically an outcast among her neighbours on account of her political views.

Many Austrians, in the capital and elsewhere, still think along the lines of Goebbels propaganda. They will tell you that they have nothing against the Anglo-Americans but detest the Russians. When you try, however, to check on their antocity stories describing Red Army soldiers as venomous beasts, you'll find out, more often than not, that their rampant accusations are based on the most flimsy evidence. And again, there are others who profess great sympathy for Communism but despise

democracy. But scratch some of those would-be radicals, and you will discover the old Nazi ideology under the thin surface of revolutionary phrases. They are like those handsome red flags displayed in Vienna on festive occasions -- most of them former Nazi banners, with the circle containing the black swastika simply painted over. A few drops of red color do the trick...

But if the Nazi minority is still going strong, the majority of the people is bewildered and undecided, rather than vicious. Even among former Nazi sympathizers, there are not many who would seriously question or oppose Allied authority. The following little incident witnessed by one of my friends ~~in Vienna~~ is typical of the curiously ambiguous, muddled spirit prevailing in Vienna today:

In a crowded Vienna streetcar two young men in British uniform were conversing in German with an unmistakably Viennese accent. The other passengers listened, not without astonishment -- until one of them finally ventured to ask the peculiar "Tommies" where they had picked up their local dialect. The two "bloaks" grinned: "Why shouldn't we speak Viennese? We were born just a few blocs from here!"

Their fellow-travellers became somewhat suspicious. What about the English uniform? Were the two young men just posing as Allied soldiers? "No," the Vienna-born limies explained, "we belong to the Army of Liberation."

Army of Liberation? No one seemed to understand. ~~Was that something subversive? There was a silence full of distrust and bewilderment.~~ *she cried, deeply.* Finally a clever matron got the idea: ~~and said~~ "Why, of course!" The Army of Liberation -- that's the guys who was fighting against us!"

Everybody smiled and nodded. The two native sons in the uniform of the enemy-liberator were the heroes of the streetcar crowd.

Having ~~And~~ dwelled on the difficulties and frustrations characteristic of life in Vienna today, we'd better add that conditions here are by no means catastrophic and may never become so, unless we allow ~~some~~ famine to undermine public morale. At present, the city seems to have settled down to some kind of shabby normalcy. Day-by-day life in the various occupation zones functions in a ~~fairly~~ smooth, orderly manner. ~~Thus, the constant jealousies and frictions among Allied authorities (particularly between Russians and Anglo-Americans) are apt to complicate the job of the local administration. Yet there is no chaos -- not even much spectacular misery.~~ People, even though pale and skinny, wear in general decent clothes and shoes. Beggars are hardly to be found at all; just exceptionally a kid may ask you for some Kaugummi (chewing gum) or a desperate tobacco addict for your half-smoked cigarette.

At times, one might almost be tempted to think that Vienna has become its old serene self again. On the occasion of a recent football match (what they call Fussball is ^{actually} ~~major~~ soccer), ~~hundreds~~ an eager crowd of 65,000 filled the great stadium to witness the victory (3 to 2) of the Austrian team over their Hungarian rivals. It was a beautiful day, with the Danube looking as nearly blue as in the good old time of Emperor Franz Joseph, and with people producing almost as much noise as they do in the U.S. on similar occasions. War and politics seemed far away -- practically forgotten.

The people of Vienna have a certain inclination to forget all about war, politics and other disturbing things. This "escapism" seems to constitute an organic part of their nature and their tradition -- which explains the ^{theater} ~~entertainment~~ boom to be noticed in this starving and struggling city. If political conditions in Vienna are muddled and explosive, if business is all but paralyzed, if reconstruction is slowed down by lack of efficiency and raw material -- the theaters and concert halls

are certainly doing well! Fed up with the drab realities of their daily life, the Viennese try to find comfort and stimulus in lofty symphonies and frivolous operettas, in ballets, dramas and farces, in spectacles and entertainments of all kinds.

Their innate predilection for drama and opera has been encouraged by the Russians, who are almost as theater-conscious as the Austrians. As soon as Red Army authorities entered the city, they established themselves as the sponsors of Vienna's world-famous show business. Theaters had to keep open, even under artillery fire. In the Russian-controlled districts, actors and musicians enjoy particular privileges, such as special food rations and transport facilities. All theatrical people in Vienna agree that the Russians are much keener on stage affairs than any of the three other occupying powers.

There may be something hectic about the present outburst of artistic activity in this impoverished, darkened capital; but the results are indeed enjoyable and impressive. At least a dozen of legitimate theaters present colorful and lively repertoires; you can see plays by Ibsen and Shaw, Strindberg and Tchekov, Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal, Cocteau and Thornton Wilder. The productions are in general on a remarkably high artistic level, even though some of the most brilliant actors are not permitted to work, on account of their political record.

The problem of "purging" Vienna's cultural life involves many difficulties. While, on the one hand, it would not be feasible to punish every ~~notorious~~ artist who continued working under the Hitler regime, it is, on the other hand, impossible to allow the public appearance of notorious Nazis. ~~As certain minimum of rigour must be regarded as necessary and inevitable, even if it has disturbing consequences, from a purely cultural point of view. For instance, it is impossible~~

It may be regrettable, from a purely cultural point of view, that a mediocre conductor had to be put in charge of the celebrated Vienna Philharmonics, while three outstanding musicians are condemned to idleness; ~~for the time being at least~~; but it cannot be helped, as those maestros are politically undesirable. The three men in question are Wilhelm Furtwängler, Clemens Krauss, and Herbert von Karajan -- the last ~~being~~ a comparatively recent discovery, praised by connoisseurs as "the greatest living conductor after Toscanini." Too bad that he was also quite an active "PG" (member of the Nazi Party) -- in contrast to Furtwängler, who was too smart to join the Party but accepted the title of a "Counsellor of State" and worked for Goebbels as the most effective international propagandist of Nazi Kultur.

Even if the Viennese try to escape from their political worries to the realm of "pure art" -- the cold fact remains that the two spheres, culture and politics, are inseparably interrelated. The cultural boom now prevailing on the Danube River will not last very long and will hardly produce any permanent values, unless the Austrians succeed in solving their basic political and economic ~~and~~ problems.

If talent is plentiful in the various fields of artistic activity, creative personalities are ~~unusually~~ scarce, alas, in the political sphere. There are, however, in postwar Austria a few competent and dynamic leaders who may be destined to play an important role in the future life of their nation. Most observers here seem to agree that the two ~~most~~ significant figures in Austrian public affairs are Dr. Karl Gruber and Ernst Fischer -- the former a member of the Catholic People's Party, the latter a Communist. Gruber serves in the present coalition government as Minister of Foreign Affairs (Secretary of State), while Fischer -- previously Minister of Culture and Education, ~~in the First Renner~~

does not hold any office now.

An intellectual of considerable learning and refined culture, Fischer established his reputation as the editor of Vienna's Socialist Arbeiterzeitung. When the Nazis invaded Austria, he escaped to the Soviet Union. During the war, he was in charge of the propaganda broadcasts addressed from Moscow to the Austrian people. His present responsibilities and interests are mostly in the field of cultural and political education: Fischer is connected with various newly founded magazines (for instance, the Oesterreichisches Tagebuch, a liberal weekly of the New Republic type) and plays a leading role in the left-wing literary set of the Austrian capital. Moreover, rumor has it that this sensitive, urbane man of letters -- a Grev Eminence of Austrian Marxism -- is more instrumental than anyone else in shaping and directing the policy and the tactics of the Communist Party.

If Fischer is well-trained in the subtleties of political dialectics, Gruber is a man of action -- simple, straightforward, practical. Only 36 years of age, the Foreign Minister -- tall, handsome, athletic -- looks like a Tyrolian skiing champion, rather than a politician or diplomat.

It was in his home-town, Innsbruck, that I first met him, early in May, 1945, just a day or two before the signing of the Armistice. Unforgettable days -- full of excitement, triumph, hope, confusion! The old town of Innsbruck, capital of North Tyrol, was all keyed up -- half-frightened, half-jubilant. Gruber, who had been the leader of the local Resistance Movement, was acting as chief of the provisional Tyrolian government. I called on him in his office at the Stadthaus (City Hall).

The place was teeming with armed men in all kinds of uniform, bewildered officials, enthusiastic patriots, inquisitive reporters, hysterical women looking for their missing husbands or for ration cards. In the midst of all this hectic agitation, Dr. Gruber appeared reassuringly sober and determined. In a quiet and unassuming, yet authoritative, manner he mastered a situation which, without his sturdy grip, might have degenerated into outright chaos.

Some months later, I read in the papers that Gruber had been called to Vienna to join the newly formed Austrian government as an Undersecretary of State. In September, 1945, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. He remained in office after the elections, which brought a sweeping victory for his political friends, ^{the} People's Party, whose more liberal wing Gruber now represents, is today, with 85 seats, just a little stronger than the two leftist parties combined.

My second meeting with Gruber took place in a milieu strikingly different from the primitive and messy setting of the Innsbruck interview. This time, the Herr Minister received me in the famous palace on the Ballhausplatz in Vienna -- an impressive structure full of historical memories, from the days of Prince Metternich to the time of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss who died in one of these sumptuous offices -- a victim of Nazi terror.

But if the surroundings had changed -- the man Gruber had remained the same: as simple, cordial and intelligent as I had known him. Was he still confident and optimistic? Yes; but a little less so, perhaps, than a year before...

With remarkable frankness he discussed the various difficulties confronting him. Clearly, the division of Austria into four occupation zones means in itself a disturbing problem to ^{the} the national Administration -- all the more so as Allied authorities do not content themselves with supervising and directing Austrian policy but keep interfering even with

details of daily administrative routine. Dr. Gruber thinks that the present system, if maintained for a considerable length of time, might result in the complete disintegration of Austria's national structure.

The situation becomes even more critical through the conflicts and jealousies among the occupying powers -- especially between the Anglo-Americans, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Russians. "How can the complex apparatus of the Allied Control Council function in an adequate way," the Foreign Minister asked, "unless its members agree upon a clear-cut, coördinated policy?"

Almost needless to say that Gruber, the Catholic and representative of a conservative party, sympathizes with the democratic-capitalistic West, rather than with the Socialist East. Also, he feels that the Anglo-Saxons are more understanding and more generous in their policy toward Austria than are the Russians. The Foreign Minister is fully aware, however, of the serious dangers inherent in current anti-Soviet tendencies, ~~and machinations~~. "As long as we tolerate or even encourage any kind of Red-baiting hysteria," he said to me, "we can hardly hope to eliminate the old Nazi spirit."

The young Austrian leader is far-sighted and realistic enough to understand that his country, as any other European nation, has a vital interest in the stability of inter-Allied friendship which alone can guarantee a lasting peace. "If we have any justified complaints against the Soviets," he pointed out, "we must be careful not to publicize them in a way that might increase any existing or potential tension between the Anglo-Saxon powers and the Soviet Union. It would be a fatal mistake to believe that we could possibly profit by such a conflict -- now or in the future. On the contrary, what we need is peace -- peace, above all!"

A small country like Austria, he insisted, has to be on good terms with everybody -- especially after having passed through a period of

catastrophic adventures. "We want to cooperate with both West and East," he said emphatically.

The relations between Austria and Czechoslovakia, he told me, are now perfectly harmonious. On the occasion of a recent visit to Prague, Dr. Gruber made the acquaintance of President Edward Benes. "A man of unusual vision and intelligence," he said. "A man of good will. I am glad to know him."

And Italy? Of course, there is always the problem of South Tyrol -- separated from Austria and given to Italy by the Peace Treaty of St. Germain, following World War I. Gruber, the born Tyrolian, feels very strongly about this question. "Surely, I am not a nationalist," he said. "But there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that South Tyrol will have to return to our country, to which it has been linked for nearly 600 years. The Tyrolians will never become good Italians: they are thoroughly Austrian in their language, in their feeling, in their cultural traditions. The wrong that has been done in 1919 will have to be corrected. Once that South Tyrol is Austrian again, there is no reason why the two nations -- Austria and Italy -- should not live together as friendly neighbours."

A restoration of the Habsburg monarchy? No, Gruber does not think that Otto has much of a chance. Nor does he believe that there will be a come-back of the clerical dictatorship in the Dollfuss tradition. "Schuschnigg is not likely to play a role in Austrian politics again," the Foreign Minister opinionated. "We want men who can help us in re-establishing and revitalizing a truly democratic spirit and a truly democratic form of government in this country. A peaceful, democratic Austria -- that should be our goal, our hope, our program!"

A peaceful, democratic Austria -- shall we live to see it materialize?

The prerequisite for such a development is, of course, a peaceful, democratic continent -- a world of stable peace and real democracy. But even ~~taking such~~ if we presume that general world conditions will be propitious -- the specific problem of Austria remains complex and delicate.

Are the Austrians just another German tribe and should be treated as such, or do they constitute a national community of higher moral and political standards? Whatever the answer may be -- we ought to make up our mind! Has Austria been defeated, or has she been liberated?

If it is true that Austria is psychologically and socially better prepared than Germany for the experiment of democratic re-education -- then let's get started and do something about it! Even if the Austrians will have to be closely watched and policed for quite a few years to come, they should not be treated as enemies, if we want them to be our friends. Or else Hitler was right, and the Ostmark (as he christened Austria) belongs actually to the Reich...

But that isn't so. Vienna is not just a provincial German town like Breslau or Dusseldorf. Vienna has a character, a flavour, a tradition of its own. Vienna is European -- the product and meeting-place of various cultural and racial elements: Slavic, Latin, Magyar, ~~and~~ Germanic. The oversized head of a dwarfish, rickety body, this once imperial city has been a headache to Europe and to itself, ever since the Habsburg empire went to pieces. Now there may be a chance to find a new function and raison d'être for this problem child among the capitals. With Berlin in ruins and disgrace, Vienna might become a center, not only of German culture, but also of Central-European economics and civilization.

~~Vienna may have a future, if the Viennese overcome their traditional skepticism and complacency -- and if the Big Three are willing to build a sound, unified Europe.~~ ^{(At present,} ~~Vienna)~~ conditions here are serious but not hopeless.

THE END