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Austria

An Austrian Socialist who, some days ago, arrived from Austria gave the following account of the situation there:

"It is striking how the feeling of solidarity amongst Austrians has increased. This solidarity is expressed, for instance, by the special emphasis with which the Austrians now talk in their own dialect and by a great friendliness to their own fellow-country-men in contrast to their abruptness towards the Germans. Even within the Wehrmacht the Austrians constitute a family of their own and expect to be able in the near future to build up a State of their own. The Germans from the Reich now living in Austria dread the future, whereas the Austrians are dominated by the desire to see the war ended soon, and are not apprehensive of the occupation and its aftermath. This might be a result of the declarations of Moscow and Teheran regarding the independence of Austria, which were broadcast by Allied wireless stations. The Austrians want to be separated from the Reich as soon as possible and are therefore less efficient soldiers than the Germans from the Reich. The observation of a German flying officer is indicative of this. He said: 'I do not understand the Viennese; although the situation in Vienna is much better than in Berlin they continually grumble and criticise everything, whereas the people in Berlin bear their misery calmly and with discipline.'

People quite openly grumble about the Nazis, for instance in air-raid shelters, in the tramways, and especially in the barracks. In the ranks of the German soldiers there are still some who believe in final victory - a belief based on some mysterious ideas and on the expectation of a miracle - but every Austrian soldier I have met was convinced of the early collapse of the Reich. The present ordeal of Austria is laid at the door of the Germans; even the terrible daily bombing of Vienna is not so much blamed on the Americans as on the Nazis who, through senselessly continuing the war, are the cause of such terrible suffering. The Viennese are firmly determined not to follow the evacuation orders of the Nazi authorities. They want to receive the Allies as their liberators and they pledge themselves to follow the example of the people of Paris who have themselves freed their city. In fact, up to now, neither woman, children nor invalids have left Vienna - and that in spite of the great plight there.

The economic situation of Vienna is extremely critical. There is no gas, no electricity, bread is in short supply, and worst of all, there is no water. Day after day the women of Vienna walk for hours to fetch water from the brooks in the Wienerwald. There are long queues in front of the baker's shops, as only quarter of a pound of bread per person is distributed per day. The bread factories are destroyed and the bakers lack water to make the dough.

The factories of Vienna have ceased production, for they

have no coal, electricity or raw-materials. At dawn the workers start queuing in front of the few safe air-raid shelters to take cover as soon as the sirens go. The alert generally lasts until two or three o'clock, but workers do not go to their factories even after the all clear has been sounded. The factory owners who, up to recently, were prepared to pay any price to obtain labour to-day wish they were allowed to dismiss their workers.

The Austrians are extremely slack in carrying out their 'Volkssturm' duties. Only 20 % of the men turn up to the 'Volkssturm' exercises on Sundays. The whole performance can in no way be regarded as a real military training. All available civil servants, judges, teachers, etc., were called up to dig trenches on the Eastern Front of Austria, but this work too is progressing extremely slowly. The Austrian officers support this passive resistance on the part of their men and Austrian doctors often give them a medical certificate or send them to hospital, even if this is not called for on medical grounds.

Those who have remained Nazi in Austria are mostly people who are so closely linked to the system that there is no way out for them. They know that the collapse of the system would mean their own extermination, too.

During recent weeks the resistance movement has gained a great impetus. Its activities are, apart from propaganda against the regime and passive resistance, active work to shorten the war and to damage the German war machine. Raids and shootings are a daily occurrence. The resistance movement issues the clandestine paper 'Freiheit' [1] (Freedom). It has its agents in governments and municipal offices, in the ranks of the Wehrmacht, and even within the SS and the Gestapo. The new impetus and momentum of the resistance movement is due to the fact that most of the small groups have united together in a single organisation which comprises all political parties, i.e., monarchists, Socialdemocrats, Catholics (Christlich Soziale). All those elements in favour of a free and independent Austria who are opposed to the Nazis are received within its ranks. The settling of political differences is postponed until after the liberation. This resistance organisation stands by the democratic Austrian Constitution of 1920 and rejects the system of Dollfuss [2]-Schuschnigg [3] as having been unconstitutional. The socialists have the strongest influence within the resistance organisation and everybody expects the Social Democratic Party of Austria - which has the cleanest record of all Austrian parties - to play a leading role in the post-war period. The Social Democratic Party is functioning through its factory cells and active officials. The Catholic Party has returned to its principles of 1920 and has adopted a positive attitude to social demands; it rejects the principles of the so-called Austro-Fascism which has lost what support it had in Austria. The strength of the Communist Party has considerably increased as compared to the influence it had in 1944 which was then practically nil. Its importance is, however, overrated outside Austria; it can by no means be compared to that of either the Socialdemocratic Party or to the Catholic Party. There are groups in Austria which favour the monarchy because in their opinion it would provide a firmer basis to the relatively new State. Supporters of monarchist ideas are to be found chiefly amongst the peasants, civil servants and the old military. But even the monarchists accept the 1930 Constitution as the basis for the new Austria. They hope, however, to obtain by democratic means the two thirds majority in Parliament which is required to change the Republican Constitution into a monarchist one. Many people outside Austria were misinformed regarding this movement, too; although the monarchist movement undoubtedly exists, it is by no means a mass movement and will

important part after the liberation.

It is amazing how little is known abroad regarding the Austrian resistance movement. The opinion is often voiced that the Austrian people has up to now given no proof of their determination to participate in their own liberation. Here are some facts which testify to the contrary: The Volksgerichtshof (People's Court) in Vienna passes three hundred death sentences a month; in addition to this trials are held almost daily in the People's Courts in Krems, St. Poelten, Linz and Graz. Many are executed without trial. Those who have seen Vienna during recent weeks know that the people of Vienna want to utilise all strategic opportunities to deal a decisive blow against their oppressors."

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - *„Freiheit“, nach „Europe speaks“ illegale Zeitung der österreichisch-deutschen Widerstandsbewegung. Weitere Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.*
- 2 - *Engelbert Dollfuß (1892-1934), österreichischer Politiker, Bundesminister für Landwirtschaft und Forsten (1931), Bundeskanzler und Außenminister einer konservativen Regierungskoalition (1932-1934), Entmachtung des Nationalrats, Suspension der parlamentarischen Verfassung und Verbot diverser Parteien (1933), autoritäres Regierungssystem auf christlich-ständischer Grundlage, enge Bindung an das faschistische Italien durch die „Römischen Protokolle“, Ermordung im Bundeskanzleramt bei einem nationalsozialistischen Putschversuch (1934).*
- 3 - *Kurt von Schuschnigg (1897-1977), österreichischer Politiker (Christlich Soziale Partei), österreichischer Nationalrat (1927), Justizminister (1932), zusätzlich Unterrichtsminister im Kabinett Dollfuß (1933), Anteil an Ausarbeitung der Notverordnung zur Aufhebung der Rechte des Parlaments, Niederschlagung des Aufstands der österreichischen Nationalsozialisten (1934), nach der Ermordung von Dollfuß Bundeskanzler (1934) und zeitweise zugleich auch Unterrichts- (1934-1936), Verteidigungs- (1934-1938) und Außenminister (1936-1938), unter Druck Hitlers Aufgabe einer selbständigen Politik Österreichs (1938: Berchtesgadener Abkommen), Rücktritt (1938), Haft, überwiegend im KZ, nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg amerikanischer Staatsbürger (1956), Rückkehr nach Österreich (1967).*