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**Righteous and courageous in the
face of Nazism: Austrian Resistance
against the Nazis**

Myths and realities

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The Classification of Resistance

The prerequisite for every engagement in a historical topic is to locate this topic within the coordinate system of time and space and then to define it according to its content. Even for an issue like Austrian resistance against National Socialism, which can so easily be defined, this is advisable. In particular, if also the areas of the impact of history into present politics and collective or private memory structures are to be covered.

Resistance, generally speaking, implies a whole variety of social refusal due to a certain political, democratic or revolutionary attitude. Resistance is the active defiance of unreasonable demands within political systems. Personal risk is a part of this. It is evident that resistance means different things under different political circumstances. Therefore, to be more precise, resistance against the totalitarian system of National Socialism is often referred to as “resistance movement” in order to make clear that any kind of organized divergence was in fact resistance. Nevertheless this term is not perfect, because it allows losing sight of the individual cases, of non-organized or spontaneous resistance. One example is the Austrian Franz Jägerstätter.

What I mean here are those women and men who, during the time of National Socialist rule in Austria, between March 1938 and May 1945, stood up against the regime. Women and men who opposed the structures and anticipations of this system and can, therefore, not be counted among the number of perpetrators, followers or those who just ignored the character of the regime. This could

be a permanent behavioral pattern of persons whose basic political attitude or religious or moral value system was in fundamental conflict with National Socialism. But this could also be a single act, spontaneous and eruptive, resulting from immediate experience of injustice. Or acts of solidarity with the families of prisoners. Also, listening to the enemy broadcastings, the illegal obtaining of food or expressing political criticism are a part of this.

Austria had, during the time which shall be examined here, disappeared from the map. The area I want to cover lies within the borders of what had been the first Republic before 1938 and the second Republic after 1945. Also when I mention the victims of terror, I refer to those persons whose place of residence was Austria in 1938 or who were covered by the Victim Welfare Act (*Opferfürsorgegesetz*) after 1945.

Academic research came to a basic agreement about size and significance of Austrian resistance already a long time ago. Last ambiguities as regards the numbers of victims killed during the National Socialist terror regime have been largely corrected, not least by major projects carried out under the auspices of the *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes* (Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance). It is clear that not all victims had been resisting against the regime. Reasons for persecution were after all divers.

Our level of knowledge in 2008, as documented by Wolfgang Neugebauer only recently, is the following: The number of Jewish Austrians killed ranges between 65.000 and 70.000, 62.000 of which have been specified by name within a large-scale project. 25.000 to 30.000 people were killed in euthanasia. The persecution of Austrian Roma resulted in 9.000 to 10.000 victims killed. The number of murdered resistance fighters lies between 4.000 and 5.000. The numbers for Austrian victims of persecution by the NS Regime is therefore around 103.000 in the lowest estimation, 115.000 in the highest one. The number of opponents to the regime who were convicted and imprisoned has approximately the same dimension. It is estimated around 100.000. This figure of about 210.000 must be compared to 700.000 members of the Nazi party and to 6.500.000 inhabitants of Austria in 1938.

The differentiation line between resistance and persecution is not always a clear one. This becomes obvious to everyone who tries to look behind the figures to see the individual human beings. You can discover attributions and self-definitions oscillating between the different groups. Additionally, even the differ-

entiation between perpetrator and victim is often not clear-cut. In particular, newer, regional studies show very clearly to what extent Gestapo had managed, through blackmailing (for example offering release from concentration camps or in criminal proceedings with offers concerning the degree of penalty), to “reverse/turn around” individuals and therefore turn victims into perpetrators, at least temporarily. Even decades after the war names of so-called “V-persons” still had to be erased from the collective memory of resistance. The boundaries shifted and in the light of these exceptional circumstances, one has to be particularly cautious about attributing blame.

The term “persecution” is naturally much wider than the term “resistance”. The regime persecuted, apart from those in hostile opposition, whole population groups on the basis of ethnic grounds. Within those groups the number of opponents of the regime clearly was disproportionately high, especially among Jewish people who became victims of the Shoah. Many Jews also were supporters of political parties, which had opposed National Socialism from the beginning. They had fought, for instance, on the side of the Republicans in the Spanish civil war or had, around the time of the so-called “Anschluss”, supported the idea of an independent Austrian state. Jews, Roma, Sinti, disabled people, homosexuals or so-called “anti-social elements” were not persecuted for their opposition but as a matter of principle. They would not fit into the image of a German State and the “Aryan superrace”.

This persecution, like resistance, had a specific Austrian post-war history, which cannot be counted among the glorious chapters of the second Republic. But this will be the topic of other presentations, therefore, we will be able to focus on the organized and individual resistance and its position within the Austrian historical perception.

Types of Resistance

Since the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance had, in the 1970s, started its major series “Resistance and persecution in the provinces”, a series, which for six of the nine Austrian provinces comprises mostly multi-volume editions, resistance in Austria is categorized according to consistent criteria. This facilitates regional comparison but is nevertheless a rather inflexible concept because the transitions between the various groups were blurred and the motivations for resistance could change.

This categorization follows to a large extent the political structures of NS times. First, there are the groups which had already been illegal during the time of the corporatist state and could therefore build on their experience with illegal activities. Those are the political organizations of the political left: Former Social Democrats who had been active underground as revolutionary socialists; Communists who, in absolute numbers, had probably even been stronger during illegality as compared to the time of their legality before the corporate state and after the liberation from National Socialism and other left splinter groups, in particular Trotskyites.

Conservative resistance had its basis primarily within the Catholic Church. Additionally, there were other conservative, catholic or legitimist, meaning monarchist, groups which resisted the regime. Apart from the groups motivated by Catholicism there were also other religious communities opposed to National Socialism because it conflicted with their moral concepts.

A large number of people, a number, which is hard to estimate, resisted National Socialism in an unorganized way. A part of this was the particularly dangerous resistance within the military. And there was definitely armed resistance dominantly, but not exclusively, practiced by the partisans in the southern parts of Austria.

a) Leftist Resistance

The political left already had a few years of experience in illegal activities when National Socialist Germany incorporated Austria. Nevertheless, the intensification of confrontation and the new dimension of personal endangerment were very obvious in 1938.

Expressed in numbers Communist resistance was by far the largest and suffered the largest number of victims. Newer research projects show that the figures Radomir Luza had calculated more than two decades ago are absolutely realistic. Around 85% of the members of Communist resistance had been Social Democrats before 1934. Of those 3.136 Communists convicted by the Nazi-“Volksgerichtshof” (“people’s court”) and by the Higher Regional Courts of Vienna and Graz respectively, only 428 had been members of the Communist Party before 1934. The mentioned courts convicted 4.232 persons who had been Social Democrats before 1934. In the respective proceedings only

228 of those were counted as Social Democrats or as Revolutionary Socialists. In large part they had become Communists and several others had chosen other forms of resistance.

Therefore, within illegality, the Communist Party could practically claim the right for sole representation of the left, which, before 1934 and after 1945, therefore during the time of legality, had been held by the Social Democrats. There are a variety of reasons for this situation:

- Many, in particular younger people abandoned Social Democracy after the civil war of February 1934 and searched for a more consistent form of opposition, which they thought was offered by the Communist Party of Austria.
- The Spanish civil war created a communist myth which manifested itself in the combat unit “February 1934” and led people to overlook the fact that from this side terror against own allies like anarchists and Trotskyites had also emanated.
- The Austrian Communist Party had, already in the last years of the corporatist state, developed a concept for a broad mobilization against National Socialism. The idea of an “Austrian nation” was put forward while Social Democrats were hoping for a pan-German revolution.
- Social Democracy was decisively weakened already in 1938 when the former sports editor of the “Arbeiter-Zeitung”, Hans Pav, was reversed by the Gestapo and, therefore, in May the core group, among them Käthe Leichter, could be arrested. Also the illegal movement of the labour union received a decisive blow with the detention of Friedrich Hillegeist.
- Those arrests were the reason for the Revolutionary Socialists to give up any form of centralized organization. Many chose exile or inner emigration like many members of the former political party, the Social Democrats, had done before.

- Karl Renner's appeal to vote "yes" in the referendum of April 1938 caused additional insecurity within large parts of the former Social Democracy.
- In addition, authorities were quick to ascribe the attribute "Communist". A donation to the "Rote Hilfe" ("red help") was often enough as it could be considered as a membership fee. And because the Austrian Communist Party was propagating an independent Austria, the accusation could also be high treason ("to separate forcibly from the Reich a territory belonging to the Reich"). This was the situation even during the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact and it certainly got worse after war broke out with the Soviet Union.
- The Austrian Communist Party upheld its centralist party structure. Therefore, often not only single persons were arrested but also whole groups were discovered which led to a dramatic increase in the number of victims.
- Membership of the Austrian Communist Party therefore exceeded membership of Social Democracy eleven fold amongst those accused before the "Volksgerichtshof" (1.106 as compared to 98 at the "Volksgerichtshof" in Vienna).

This can serve as an explanation why Communists constitute the largest resistance group comprising by far the highest number of victims. This has consequences for the assessment of resistance until today.

b) Ecclesiastical and conservative resistance

The Catholic Church which is dominant in Austria had, between 1934 and 1938, provided the ideological backing for the Corporatist State. Nevertheless in March 1938 its leader, Cardinal Innitzer tried to reach a rapprochement with the new leadership. But already in October of the same year a demonstration of almost 10.000 Catholics against National Socialism made the differences obvious. This demonstration was the first and the last mass demonstration between 1938 and 1945. The Nazis reacted by storming and devastating the palace of the Archbishop and making mass arrests. From then onwards the official church was anxious to calm the situation, nevertheless individual priests and members

of religious orders remained at the center of resistance. The number of victims was high.

Erika Weinzierl was able to research the names of 724 Austrian priests who had been imprisoned. 15 were sentenced to death and executed. 110 priests were sent to concentration camps, 90 of which did not survive. One nun, the beatified sister Restituta was executed. Also Franz Jägerstätter, perhaps the figurehead of Austrian resistance, can be seen as a part of this environment. He refused to follow the conscription call to Wehrmacht and was executed in 1943.

The church in Austria opposed the euthanasia programs initiated by National Socialism, even though not as consistently as in the so-called "Altreich". In Germany, in particular the Protestant Church excelled in this context. In Austria on the other hand, the Protestant Church, due to its history, has to be considered clearly more affiliated with the regime. Several Nazi officials of the second organisational level were recruited from a Protestant environment as newer studies regarding the district Oberwart in Burgenland, at this time part of the Gau Styria, show.

The Catholic Church also set up a "Hilfsstelle für nichtarische Katholiken" ("Help center for non-Aryan Catholics"), which, in individual cases, was able to make arrangements to enable exile.

Situated at the intersection between catholic and conservative-legitimist resistance was for example the Austrian Liberation Movement around the priest Karl Roman Scholz. It had around 100 members and was finally reported by a police informer. Another very active group had formed in the monastery of Wilhering as the "Larger Austrian Liberation Movement". This group as well as the group "Austrian Liberation Movement" was destroyed and many death sentences were pronounced. Also the abbot of the monastery Wilhering who had not been involved in the groups died in prison.

Apart from those well-known groups, today we have the records of a larger number of resistance groups within the catholic youth movement. Also in these cases the regime was merciless.

Apart from Catholics, also other religious groups were in conflict with the regime due to their normative and value systems. Jehovah's Witnesses, a group already not recognized during the time of the corporatist state, the Nazis called

them “Bible researchers”, were sent to concentration camps for conscientious objection. 12 cases were dealt with before the “Volksgerichtshof” and the Higher Regional Courts. The same was true of other smaller religious groups like the Adventists, for instance.

The persecution of the Jews who were still present in Austria, in the so-called “Ostmark” shows, how blurred the differentiation between resistance and persecution could be. Jews contravened regulations for example the time-restrictions for their life in public and were arrested for reporting offences or for statements critical towards the regime. Many Jews also were Communists, which doubled their peril. What has to be mentioned here is that within the cooperation between Jews on the one hand and so-called “Aryans” on the other hand, a grey area tending towards resistance existed. So-called “mixed marriages”, the supporting of “U-Boots” (people in hiding) and many more things indicate a willingness to resist.

c) Resistance within the military and armed forms of resistance

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers faced proceedings within the military judiciary system. Thousands of convictions for high treason, desertion or “Wehrkraftzersetzung” (the undermining of military morale), which took place in the field, led to executions in the midst of armed conflict.

The image of the “clean Wehrmacht” can, according to the results of latest research and after the “Wehrmachtsausstellung” (“Wehrmacht exhibition”), not be maintained. The exhibition was, in particular for this reason, accompanied by fierce protests, also at the University of Graz in the 1990s. But one cannot see the Wehrmacht as something homogeneous. Willing cooperation in a war of extermination against civilian populations is complemented by the image of thousands of victims within the Wehrmacht. And in Vienna parts of the Wehrmacht were well prepared to take over control in the days around July 1944.

What can legitimately be attributed to Austrian resistance is not easy to judge. The figures I mentioned before are the result of studies regarding the “Volksgerichte” carried out by the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance. Those victims within the Wehrmacht, amongst whom the Austrians were without a doubt represented at least proportionally, are not included.

What is of particular importance, especially in the light of the Moscow Declaration, is that also armed resistance against National Socialism had existed. From 1942 onwards groups were beginning to form. In particular the dominantly Slovenian partisans in the area of the Styrian-Carinthian border region on the “Koralpe” reached some importance. Also in the Upper Styrian industrial area around Donawitz there were armed groups who managed to carry out at least some acts of sabotage. In Tyrol and eventually also in the “Salzkammergut” many soldiers returning from the front did not return to the army but went to the mountains in order to form, still in possession of their weapons, the nucleus for an armed resistance. And finally, Austrian Communists returning from exile in Moscow joined the Tito partisans to fight from Slovenia for the liberation of Austria. All of this was certainly not enough to overthrow the National Socialist regime from within. Nevertheless, those were important contributions to its defeat.

d) Individual Resistance

The number of cases in which individual persons refused to bow to the regime are harder to estimate. This is due to the variety of possible acts ranging from statements undermining morale, for example as regards lack of supplies, or directed against particular politicians over listening to enemy broadcasts to refusing to work. Humane behavior towards forced laborers in agriculture and enterprises and sometimes even very personal relationships with them, can be counted in. There were maladjusted youths who attracted attention due to their clothing or hairstyle.

What actually was resistance in these cases, in particular as regards the question of delivery of foodstuffs, is a question, which is not easy to answer. Not every illegal slaughtering of a pig can be seen as an act of resistance. But what is certain is that the maladjusted part of the Austrian population was also the part from which resistance would be recruited or which offered it at least some protection. Not to notify the authorities of dissident activities was, in a certain way, an act of solidarity with the resistance.

Like the National Socialist system could only establish its network of terror because so many were actively supporting it (teachers but also students, Block wardens, neighbors), so was resistance dependant on networks of tolerance. But the boundaries remain blurred.

e) Resistance in Exile

This presentation is not the right place to go deeper into the achievements of the various groups of those living in exile, may it be in London, Moscow, New York or anywhere else. But it has to be mentioned that those groups facilitated the planning/strategies of the allies and broadened their knowledge and understanding of regional circumstances. Through this and through keeping up radio stations that could be received in Austria, but also actively in the armies, those groups considerably contributed to the collapse of National Socialism.

f) Resistance towards the end of the War

The more obvious the defeat of the German machinery of war became, the more people in the “Ostmark” came together to think about the time after National Socialism and to develop strategies. The group 05, whose sign is still visible on Stephansdom in Vienna today, is the most famous of those days. Zero in this context stands for O while 5 refers to the fifth letter in the alphabet, E. OE means Austria, therefore not “Ostmark” anymore. Also the group “Freies Österreich” (“Free Austria”) was a group beyond party lines.

In some cities, like Salzburg or Innsbruck, courageous individuals managed to bring about a capitulation of the cities before large-scale destruction could take place. In Vienna this was not achieved. The withdrawing Germans hanged the officers Biedermann, Huth and Raschke at the Floridsdorfer Spitz for their efforts in this direction.

Also in the concentration camps politicians met across political frontiers and built up those human relationships that made it possible to work together after the war.

After 1945: Instrumentalisation, Exclusion, and Myths

Ida Schullin had distributed communist leaflets in Styria and was, due to the help of an at least partially antifascist attorney, sentenced only to 15 months in prison, in spite of the fact that her charge was high treason. A few weeks ago she said in an interview, that on the third of August 1946 she took a bus to Carinthia with the Communist youth organization. A serious accident happened

on the way in which many died. Ida herself was unconscious for several days and her son lost a leg. In the hospital of Wolfsberg, the same place where I was born 15 months later, the responsible senior physician, a “Medizinalrat” reportedly refused to treat Communists. Wolfsberg is also the city where Mr. Novak, one of the closest colleagues of Eichmann and responsible for the railway logistics for the transports to the extermination camps, could live unchallenged and respectably. He wrote his weekly column for the newspaper, was officially employed by a print shop and was greeted warmly in the coffee house. Almost everyone knew about his past, but there was acceptance or at least silent tolerance.

Certainly, Carinthia was different already back then. The tight network of an educated, German-nationalist, anti-Slovenian and anti-Communist but also anti-religious middle class which had been created through gymnastics clubs (“Turnvereine”), school associations (“Schulvereine”) and similar organizations survived. It survived the time before 1938 when in 1934 the Nazis organized a successful coup d’état, at least in the Lavanttal, it survived the National Socialist years and it survived afterwards, despite being divided between different political groups. One of those groups definitely also was affiliated with Social Democrats.

Nevertheless, the story of the social proscription that former resistance fighters experienced only 16 months after the end of the war, can be considered as symptomatic not only for Carinthia. In those days the political climate already began to change. And maybe, the positive status of the resistance was never really true outside the consensus of the elites.

a) The Moscow Declaration and the consensus of the elites

When the Foreign ministers of the USA, the Soviet Union and Great Britain signed the “Moscow Declaration”, which was published on the first of November 1943, two facts, which were to become of essential importance for Austrian post-war history, were codified for the first time. On the one hand, the restoration of a free and independent Austria was determined as a war aim, on the other hand, it was determined that Austria had to make an own contribution to its liberation.

The idea of an independent Austria, which had before only been present amongst Communists and Legitimists, began to become a part of the post-

war ideas and plans of other groups. In exile, but also inside the concentration camps, an additional agreement was established, which can be condensed to the slogan “Nie wieder Faschismus” (“Fascism never again”). The so-called “Geist der Lagerstraße” (“spirit of the camp road”), which is often dismissed as a myth, actually was the common understanding of prisoners from all different political groups, that the enemy was National Socialism. Emigration and resistance met within this spirit in 1945. In the so called “first volume” of the red-white-red book of the year 1946, which was never followed by a second one, at least parts of the resistance were officially documented in order to prove the Austrian contribution to the liberation. This was considered the first step towards the “Staatsvertrag”.

This consensus of the elites could be communicated to the basis only insufficiently. 700.000 Austrians had been members of NSDAP; many more had benefitted from the system in one way or another and had come to terms with it/had adjusted to it. Almost every family had sent a soldier to the Wehrmacht. They all had experienced the death, loss, wounding or imprisonment of friends and relatives. Most people therefore experienced 1945 as a defeat with all its horrors and the approaching red army did not contribute to a feeling of liberation.

This is how the image of history was separated into two different lines: The official, the state view, was opposed by what was orally passed on within the families.

b) Courting the former Nazis

In 1945 Austria had definitely taken legal measures to end National Socialism. Already on the 8th of May 1945 the “Verbotsgesetz” (“prohibition act”) was enacted, which withdrew the legal foundations of the NSDAP and of all of its associate organisations. At the same time this act tried to regulate the handling of war criminals. All members of NS organizations had to register. Those, finally 524.000, people were excluded from the elections in 1945. “Volksgerichte” (“people’s courts”) passed 43 death sentences, 30 of which were executed, as well as many long-term prison sentences. 170.000 people were dismissed from public service and higher taxes, so-called “Sühneabgaben” (“expiation charges”), were imposed.

After a short while it became clear, however, that the political situation was going to change. The reasons can be found in domestic as well as in foreign politics. Within the country, it was simply not possible to permanently keep more than half a million adults from exercising their voting rights. After all, the so-called “Minderbelastetenamnestie” (“amnesty for all but the leading figures”) brought 480.000 new voters to the political market. As regards foreign policy, the (so-called) Cold War and with it a new front line between Communism and the “free West” was developing bringing along new enemies.

Within this new political climate the two large Austrian political parties were courting the former Nazis for their votes while resistance slowly developed an aura of treason and was ascribed mainly to the Communists or to the national minorities, in particular to the Slovenians. Both attributions were equivalent to a social proscription. On festive days or in the international negotiations for the “Staatsvertrag” (“state treaty”) the existence of resistance was highlighted while in everyday life and within domestic politics it was becoming more and more stigmatized.

The ÖVP (People’s Party) offered the former Nazis fixed seats in the parliament and the position of the Federal President. The SPÖ (Socialist Party) counted more on a splitting of the bourgeois camp and even printed the posters for the party of the former Nazis, the “Verband der Unabhängigen” (VdU, “Alliance of the Independents”). The elections of 1949 exposed the pointlessness of those efforts: Both large political parties were able to collect approximately one third of the former Nazi voters, there were different figures in the different provinces depending on their political culture, while the remaining third went directly to the VdU. The result was a firm anchoring of the “third camp” in Austrian domestic politics.

c) Memorials and Culture of Remembrance

Directly after the end of the war the consensus of the elites manifested itself in the memorial culture. Where there had been mass graves and places of extermination memorial sites were established. Memorial sites for the liberation were created, the one on Schwarzenbergplatz in Vienna being an exceptional example. Even memorial places for the resistance were established. Until today the engraving “05” on the Stephansdom is such a place but also on cemeteries one can sometimes find places of remembrance.

But this was true only for a short period of time after the end of the war. Later the monuments for resistance were scaled down again. An example can be found in the Paulustorgasse in Graz. What is left of the plans for a distinctive interference with the urban landscape at the place where the political prisoners were kept, tortured and also executed, is a modest sign on the weathered walls of the old fortification. And for many years this was all. Only in the last two decades this subject has been taken up more actively again. The Albertinaplatz in Vienna, the Judenplatz and the renaming of the square in front of the University of Innsbruck into “Geschwister Scholl Platz” are all signs of this in recent times.

Since the late 1940s and until the middle of the eighties the remembrance of National Socialism was, in particular in the non urban parts of the country, equated with the remembrance of the victims of the war. Every village has its war memorial on which it says: “dedicated to the dead soldiers of both world wars” and in most cases also “who died for the defense of the home country”. Every year on the second of November, religious processions starting at the war memorials move on to the cemeteries for All Souls Day. To have been a resistance fighter, maybe even a saboteur, to have stood up against the regime, to have weakened it from within; all of this was not appreciated in this environment.

d) Historiography on Resistance

Sporadically there was research on resistance in Austria and among Austrians in exile even when this issue received no attention, neither in domestic nor in world politics. Even though the government had still collected materials and even organized an exhibition with the title “Never forget” (“Niemals vergessen”) in 1946, the issue had moved, for the reasons already mentioned, almost out of the field of perception. In 1958 Otto Molden wrote his book on resistance, which, to a large extent, ignored the Communists. 5 years later Hermann Mitteräcker published his Communist counter piece. But in 1962 a larger project was supposed to compile the history of Austrian resistance for the “Commemorative year 1965”. Members of the team were Ludwig Jedlicka who later became the first professor for contemporary history in Vienna, Karl R. Stadler, at this time still in exile in Nottingham, from 1968 onwards at the University of Linz, and Herbert Steiner, the founder of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance. This corresponded to the political spectrum of the

anti-Fascist Austria. In 1963 the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DOEW) was opened. In 1970 the series “Resistance and Persecution” was started, starting with the issues for Vienna, then for the provinces. Until today the series remains incomplete. And it is not only Carinthia that is missing.

I am part of the generation, which populated the DOEW in the late 1960s. This included Helene Maimann, Wolfgang Neugebauer and Willibald Holzer. There we met the people who stood for the other Austria. My uncle had his blood group tattooed in his armpit because he had been a member of the SS. The people we met there had numbers tattooed on their forearm because they had to suffer in the concentration camps. We also met representatives of the old anti-Fascist consensus: Cardinal König came to visit us as well as Paul Schärf, the nephew of the Federal president and of course also the leading Communists. There, amongst the documents and books, my generation could gain experiences which diametrically contradicted the common stereotypes (there was no other possibility, there was no room for maneuver, there was a lot we could not know and so on). Herbert Steiner who had survived in exile in London became our main contact person. It was him, who, as Wolfgang Neugebauer did not want to leave Vienna, brought me to Linz, to Karl Stadler.

The institutes for contemporary history established in Vienna in 1965, in Linz in 1968, in Klagenfurt in 1973, in Salzburg in 1976, in Innsbruck in 1982 and finally in Graz in 1984 could build on all people who had received their academic socialisation in this research environment. Gerhard Botz went from Linz first to Salzburg and then to Vienna. Willibald Holzer is part of the founding generation of the institute for contemporary history in Klagenfurt. And me, I went from Linz to Innsbruck for a year to move on to build up the institute in Graz from 1984 onwards. Wolfgang Neugebauer followed Herbert Steiner at the DOEW. Today we can be proud of the next generations of contemporary historians.

e) The Waldheim debate

During the electoral campaign for the Austrian federal presidency of 1986, a few statements suddenly gave rise to totally new questions regarding the handling of resistance. Kurt Waldheim had in his own words “only carried out his duty” during the Second World War. This statement reflected the opinion that the opponents of the system, the conscientious objectors like Franz Jägerstätter,

the listeners of enemy broadcastings, the “Wehrkraftzersetzer” (the ones undermining military moral) were people who had, in turn, not carried out their duties and had therefore placed themselves outside of an apparently accepted legal system.

Over four decades after the end of the war history began to be filled with new life again. The “Opferthese” (“victim theory”) definitely clashed with Waldheim’s views. The national-political point of view arising from the consensus of the post-war time elites, which had after all led to the signing of the state treaty, was undermined during this electoral campaign. The subliminal narrative strand, which stated that anyway almost everyone was a Nazi and that there had been no room for maneuver, had reached the presidential level.

It was only consistent that Franz Vranitzky, who had followed Fred Sinowatz as Federal Chancellor, then held his remarkable speeches on the question of the complicity of Austrians regarding the crimes of National Socialism. Resistance was thereby made respectable in a new way: Those in resistance were now seen as having identified the criminal nature of National Socialism at an early stage and as having made the courageous individual decision to stand up against National Socialism in spite of the great danger involved.

If this classification of resistance, resulting from the Waldheim debate, should be representative for today’s perception of those years, the emotional discourse of the second half of the 1980s at least has this as a positive side-effect.

f) Contemporary Witness Activities

In the elections in September 2008, among the age group of 16 to 18 year olds, who were allowed to vote for the first time, 44% chose to vote for the FPÖ. Taken together with the results of the BZÖ this is a clear majority for the far-right Parties amongst the adolescent voters. Those figures suggest that awareness training with regards to politics in the time of National Socialism has not been very successful. The political isolation of deniers of the Holocaust, of those talking of “the good employment policy of the Third Reich” and the “sincerity and respectability” of SS veterans has clearly lost its importance. For young people this has no relevance anymore. The disco generation accepts this as being postmodern arbitrariness and goes for the seemingly bold slogans.

This is the situation, although we have been sending survivors of the Holocaust and of National Socialist terror to schools for more than two decades. I myself have accompanied these contemporary witnesses countless times and could see how moving those encounters with “the other Austria” were for the youngsters. Maria Cäsar, one of the women who have tirelessly been traveling Styria as contemporary witnesses, is now a honorary citizen of the city of Graz because she has, independent of her Communist affinity, acquired an outstanding reputation.

But the members of the generation of contemporary witnesses are over 80 years old today. Their numbers are declining and regarding the visits to schools there are limits to their physical abilities. Therefore, the musealization of the subject matter of resistance cannot be impeded. But it seems we have at least managed to limit the historical influence of the equation “resistance equals treason”. Resistance has a positive connotation today even within the established system of the major parties and the social partners.

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