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Günter Bischof, Series Editor

Austria in the Twentieth Century

Edited by Rolf Steininger, Günter Bischof,
and Michael Gehler

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editors

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in the
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For Gordon "Nick" Mueller

German government pushed ahead with the interpretation of the *diktat*. What followed on 9 March 1938 was the attempt by Schuschnigg to compel an anti-Nazi *levée en masse* by calling for a referendum entitled "For a free and German, independent and public-spirited, for a Christian and united Austria!" to be held on 13 March. For the first time, conversations with the leftists gave rise to concrete action, despite the fact that, even in this situation, Schuschnigg remained standoffish in his dealings with leftist functionaries. But this domestic political mobilization came too late. While Austrian patriots and anti-Nazis representing the entire political spectrum were still writing slogans, putting up posters, and handing out fliers for Schuschnigg's referendum, the German government was turning up the heat on Austria. Military blackmail was now added to the political extortion. The German invasion was preceded by an intra-Austrian partial takeover of power by the Nazis, after Schuschnigg was forced to resign on 11 March and to allow Arthur Seyss-Inquart to assume power.

12 November 1918-12 March 1938: The Road to the Anschluß

Rolf Steininger

"As Führer and chancellor of the German nation and the Reich, I hereby announce before history the entry of my homeland into the German Reich!"

With these words spoken on 15 March 1938—a Tuesday—Adolf Hitler ended the "liberation rally" on *Heldenplatz* (Heroes' Square) in Vienna attended by a few hundred thousand people. Hitler delivered his report of "a historical mission accomplished" from the balcony of the New Imperial Palace; the assembled multitude responded with unending cheers and shouts of "*Sieg Heil!*" For all the world to see, Austria had been brought "home into the Reich," and it seemed as though a longstanding wish—one that had been ardently expressed since the end of World War I—had finally come to fruition. This prologue, which begins in autumn 1918, is especially important for an understanding of the events of March 1938. It shows that what occurred then did not take place in a vacuum, and that the Nazis intentionally built upon pre-existing circumstances and established continuities, although these were highly modified from their original form—such as Hitler's visit to Innsbruck on 5 April 1938, when he was presented with the documents of the Anschluß referendum held in the Province of Tyrol on 24 April 1921, and was celebrated as the one who had consummated this expression of the people's will.

"Home into the Reich!" "One people, one Reich!" "Greater Germany, our future!" These and similar slogans were already

Adolf Hitler addressing the masses in Vienna's *Heldenplatz* (Heroes' Square) after the Anschluss on 15 March 1938.



Source: Institute of Contemporary History, Innsbruck

commonplace in Austria as early as 1918-19, when it was still known as *Deutschösterreich* (German-Austria). From then on, the subject of Anschluss somehow remained on the agenda and had an impact—at times as a pressing issue, at others from the back burner—on political life in Austria. Six relatively well-defined stages mark the path leading up to the events of March 1938:

1. Socialist Anschluss euphoria in 1918-19 in Austria;
2. the Anschluss (or, more properly, unification) movements in the Austrian provinces in 1921;
3. Anschluss propaganda and practical alignment policies pursued in the 1920s;
4. the German-Austrian Customs Union project of 1931;
5. Hitler in power; the “quick solution” of 1933-34;
6. the evolutionary solution via the “mental saturation” of Austria, with the Anschluss in March 1938.

These stages, discussed in more detail below, were influenced by considerations of political and economic expediency: in stages one to three, Austria was the active suitor; at stage four, Germany took the lead; and by stages five and six, there was no longer even a trace of Austrian desire for an Anschluss—at least on the official government level.

Stage One: The Socialist Anschluss Euphoria of 1918-19

A notable date in the history of Austria is 12 November 1918. On that day, the men who had been elected in 1911 to represent the German territories of the Habsburg Monarchy in the imperial Parliament (*Reichsrat*) and who had convened in Vienna on 21 October 1918 as the “Provisional National Assembly for German-Austria” ordained and established a new constitution; in Article 1, the new state of German-Austria—which was also meant to include the Sudeten German areas—was declared to be a democratic republic, and Article 2 went on to state that “German-Austria is a component part of the German Republic.” In other words, at the very moment of its birth, the new state declared itself to be unviable, a stigma that it would be unable to rid itself of in the following years. What had come into being was the state “that nobody wanted.”

Social Democratic Chancellor Karl Renner, in a speech delivered before Parliament on 12 November, passionately voiced his belief in German unity. He lamented the fate of the German *Volk* and declared: “The people that has always been proud to be called the people of poets and thinkers now lies prostrate. But in this hour, our German people throughout all the districts we inhabit should know this: we are one community sharing a common fate.”

Otto Bauer, intellectual leader of the Social Democrats and secretary of state for foreign affairs, informed German legislator Hugo Haase about the resolution passed unanimously on 12 November in a telegram sent to Berlin the following day, in which he stated that German-Austria had “expressed its will to be reunited with the other Germanic nations from whom it had been separated fifty-two years ago [Königgrätz 1866; R. St.]. We request that you . . . enter into direct negotiations with us concerning the unification of German-Austria with the German Republic.” At the same time, he asked that coal and foodstuffs be shipped quickly to

Austria, and expressed hope "that the old . . . ties that still exist between political party colleagues will now facilitate our efforts to establish a close and lasting connection between Germany and German-Austria."

Furthermore, it was decided to send a historian named Hartmann, son of one of the representatives who had met at Paul's Church in 1848, as an envoy to Berlin in order to awaken "understanding and enthusiasm for the Anschluss." Three days later, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was advised that German-Austria "wished to reestablish with Germany the close constitutional ties that were severed by the sword fifty-two years before," and he was asked for his support. Four months later, on 12 March 1919, the resolution passed on 12 November by the constituent National Assembly was "ceremonially reiterated, confirmed and reinforced." In a programmatic address, Otto Bauer stated that "the unification of German-Austria with the great German Republic . . . is today once again in our platform."

What were the reasons for this policy? Karl Renner, also the first chancellor of the Second Republic, answered this question in 1945. According to his interpretation, hunger and joblessness in 1918 had led everyone to think that the Anschluss was the only possible solution. "If you understand Austria's disastrous economic situation, you will understand the movement favoring the Anschluss." At the time, the Social Democrats were convinced of the necessity of large spheres of economic activity. A land without coal, one that was unable to produce sufficient foodstuffs within its own territory and was without major export industries could not exist independently according to Otto Bauer's thinking in July 1919; the inhabitants of such a land would lead a life of servitude, penury, and misery under the yoke of foreign capitalists. The only thing that could prevent this from happening to Austria was unification with Germany.

There is no denying that there was hunger and suffering during the postwar years, although the anguish of the times made many lose sight of the fact that the Republic was not as poor as many then believed. It had within its territory 12 percent of the population of the former Habsburg Empire, but approximately 30 percent of its industrial capacity. Vienna had been the financial center of the old Double Monarchy, and there was still a lot of money in Vienna.

Thus, aside from economic considerations, there were other reasons for the Social Democrats' Anschluss euphoria. Their goal was to form a united front with the German Social Democrats. As a speech from the February 1919 election campaign put it: "We want to come together with red Germany. Unification with Germany now means unification with socialism."

Only the Austrian German Nationalist Party was as enthusiastic as the Social Democrats in its support for the Anschluss. Both parties conducted their campaigns for the National Assembly using the slogans cited above, winning twenty-five and sixty-nine seats respectively, as compared to sixty-three for the Christian Socials, who were anything but enthused by the subject of Anschluss, to say nothing of the red Germany that so raised the spirits of the Social Democrats. Indeed, the parliamentary resolution of 12 November passed unanimously, but the delegates had been pressured by the threats of revolution coming from the Red Guard and the crowd on the street. The minutes of the session record repeated shouts like, "We're being fired upon!" and Ludwig Brügel, the chief press officer of the state council (*Staatsrat*), took a bullet in the eye. Thus, in the Christian Social election platform published on 25 December 1918 in the *Reichspost*, the party's newspaper, the Anschluss was, significantly, not mentioned. Moreover, the Christian Social Party—which was, after all, the one with which the majority of the Austrian population outside of Vienna was affiliated—did not even participate in Anschluss rallies conducted throughout Austria on 11 May 1919.

The decision made in Vienna on 12 November was received with cool restraint in Berlin, since it had already been made known on 9 November in Bern that, in the case of an Anschluss, the Entente would impose harder peace terms upon Germany. Therefore, when Bauer's telegram was discussed at the legislative session held on 15 November, it was decided "not to go into the question of unification due to the overall international situation." Vienna reacted accordingly; there was "disappointment that the Anschluss question was not mentioned. The press of all political affiliations is reserved, hardly any discussion of the answer," reported German Ambassador von Wedel.

Hartmann addressed the *Reichskonferenz* in Berlin on 25 November 1918 and requested that German-Austria be accepted into the German Reich with the words: "As representative of the Austrian

people, I extend to the German people the hand of brotherhood and ask that you take it." German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Solf immediately objected. He warned against taking such a step prior to the peace negotiations since it might jeopardize the peace that was so desperately needed, and he stated that he could not accept responsibility for the consequences. The effect of Solf's words was "like being doused with cold water." According to Colonel von Häften, one of the participants, Friedrich Ebert, Social Democrat and head of government, also "declined to accept the hand offered in brotherhood," whereby "this historically momentous event, which could have endowed the world war with some historical sense for Germany, came to a pathetic conclusion."

But this was not true as far as the German public was concerned. On 17 January 1919, the entire press was calling for the Anschluss, and all parties came out in favor of it on 5 February. This was the mood that greeted Bauer when he arrived in Germany on 21 February to carry on discussions in Berlin and Weimar with Foreign Minister Brockdorff-Rantzau. The impression he got was that German-Austria would be "welcomed with brotherly convictions" into the Reich and would find "the most sincere willingness to provide fraternal assistance." On 2 March, the discussions ended with the signing of a secret agreement stating that the unification of the two states should be carried out "as speedily as possible." According to its provisions, German-Austria was to be amalgamated with the Reich as an "independent constituent member state" with certain special rights (including Vienna as second capital enjoying equal status, in which the president of the Reich would reside from time to time). Various commissions composed of equal numbers of representatives from both states would prepare the alignment in the fields of jurisprudence, commerce, transportation, education, and social policy.

Nevertheless, it was the Germans, whose view was focused on the peace conference in Versailles, who failed to then go ahead with the decisive step. The attitude of France was well known: it had worked itself up into absolute abhorrence of the idea of an Anschluss. No French politician was prepared to permit vanquished Germany to expand its territory and to add some 6.5 million people to its population. Then, in Article 80 of the Treaty of Versailles, the victors

strictly established the independence of Austria and the inviolability of its borders. Indeed, the German delegation protested, explaining that Germany "never had, and will never have, the intention to shift the border of German-Austria," and demanded the right of self-determination for Germany too. The opposition merely "took note" of this explanation, and, on 28 June 1919, the peace treaty was signed.

Two months later, on 2 September in Saint Germain, Karl Renner was given a draft of the treaty with Austria along with a five-day ultimatum. South Tyrol and the Kanal Valley were to go to Italy, parts of Styria and Carinthia to Yugoslavia, the Sudeten German lands to Czechoslovakia. A ban on an Anschluss was spelled out in Article 88 here as well: "The independence of Austria is immutable, unless the Council of the League of Nations agrees to a change. Therefore, Austria pledges, except with the express approval of the above-mentioned Council, to refrain from any and all activities that could, directly or indirectly or in any other way . . . jeopardize its independence."

The Austrian National Assembly accepted the treaty under protest on 10 September 1919. Six weeks later on 21 October 1919, since an Anschluss was obviously no longer within the realm of possibilities, in implementing the Treaty of St. Germain, not only was the name *Deutschösterreich* changed to the *Republik Österreich*, but the previously passed resolution stating that "German-Austria is a component part of the German republic" was repealed.

During these weeks of chaos and resignation, the young republic experienced one success that enhanced its self-image. Two days after the ceasefire between Austria-Hungary and the Allies, Southern Slav units had moved into southern Carinthia, and Austria's repeated protests to the Allies against the military action taken by its Yugoslav neighbors brought no relief. The new Yugoslav state (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) lodged ever-growing territorial claims.

On 5 December 1918, the Assembly of the Province of Carinthia decided to take up armed resistance against the intruders. The defensive action claimed approximately 270 lives on the Carinthian side and 250 Yugoslav dead. By early May, the Yugoslav units had been pushed back to a small pocket south of Eisenkappl, but then powerful Slav forces moved forward on a broad front and the

Carinthian defenses collapsed. Yugoslav troops marched into the capital city of Klagenfurt on 6 June 1919 as Carinthian units retreated. In contrast to other German-speaking regions, the Allied Council in Paris decided to hold a plebiscite in Carinthia. After repeated calls by the Allies for them to withdraw, the Yugoslav units left Klagenfurt at the end of July 1919 and pulled back behind the demarcation line.

Two zones were established for the plebiscite. In the southern Zone A, Slovenian-speakers predominated (79 percent) according to the results of the 1910 census. A second round of balloting would be conducted in the "eye of the needle" Zone B—including Klagenfurt and an overwhelming German majority—only if the vote in Zone A turned out in favor of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs administered Zone A; the Austrians administered Zone B.

The plebiscite was set for 10 October 1920. During the weeks leading up to that date, the agitation by both sides reached its highpoint, and thousands of flyers flooded the area in which voting would take place. Astoundingly, the plebiscite itself then came off quite peacefully, and voter turnout was a remarkably high 96 percent. Slightly more than 22,000 voters (59 percent) in Zone A chose to remain part of Austria, versus about 15,200 (just under 41 percent) for Yugoslavia. On 18 November the southern Carinthian Zone A reverted back to Austria. Due to this outcome, the planned plebiscite in the predominantly German-speaking Zone B was cancelled.

Stage Two: The Anschluß Movement in the Austrian Provinces and the Geneva Protocol

If Otto Bauer's demonstrative resignation on 25 July 1919 was an admission that his Anschluß policy had failed, then the acceptance of the peace treaty and the legislation of 21 October seemed to drive the last nail into the coffin of the Anschluß issue. But appearances were deceiving. The "Republic of Austria," a state that came into existence under the motto "*L' Autriche, c'est ce qui reste*" (Austria, that's what's left over), was now, in the aftermath of territorial losses, truly an unviable state in the eyes of the vast majority of its population, and for all those who were unwilling to believe in this state, the Anschluß, in spite of Article 88, now really did seem to be the only way out of this worsening state of despair. At this point, the

focus of the Anschluß movement largely shifted to the provinces—first and foremost to Tyrol, Salzburg, and Styria.

As the economic situation became ever more unbearable over the following months during which a hungry population was demonstrating in the streets, the National Assembly called upon the federal government on 1 October 1920 to conduct a plebiscite on the Anschluß within six months. Through the use of threats—in particular, of a "starvation blockade"—and with a sharply worded note from Paris on 17 December, France succeeded in halting this plebiscite. Then on 10 February 1921, the German Nationalist Representative Dinghofer introduced a bill in Parliament calling for a referendum in which the following question would be put to a vote: "Shall the federal government petition the Council of the League of Nations to approve the Anschluß of the Republic of Austria to the German Reich?"

Although it was thought that the former Entente powers could have no objection to this approach since the peace treaty had, after all, specifically provided for going about the Anschluß in this way, the Allies under French leadership tried almost every means to prevent this referendum. They wished to avoid at all costs any discussion in the League of Nations of an Austrian petition for Anschluß; the "no" from France would deal a blow to the prestige of that body that could perhaps call its very existence into question.

The provincial governments saw that pressure from the victorious powers was depriving the central government of its freedom to act. They resolved to conduct the referendum on a province-by-province basis, but this drew sharp protests from the Allies as well. On 14 April 1921, the French envoy in Vienna, Lefèvre-Pontalis, called upon Christian Social Chancellor Michael Mayr, a representative from Tyrol, "to quash these subversive intrigues aimed at bringing about an Anschluß"; otherwise, all aid for Austria would be suspended. The federal and provincial governments objected, and on 24 April in Tyrol, the plebiscite mandated by the province's legislature took place anyway. In it, 98.15 percent of the ballots were cast in favor of the Anschluß. Immediately thereafter, the barriers blocking the border crossings at Kufstein and Scharnitz were removed, and this was later done in Salzburg as well. What followed were similar resolutions by the legislatures in Salzburg and Styria to

conduct referendums if a national plebiscite did not take place. Obviously to prevent further provincial referendums, the above-mentioned bill was passed into law, whereupon the Allies increased the pressure on Austria even more. Paris was resolved to take even the most drastic steps, threatening to terminate the loan negotiations, and even to carve up the country and pass out the pieces to Austria's neighbors. Mayr did succeed in seeing to it that the referendum in Salzburg would only be conducted on a "private basis," whereby 98.8 percent of those who voted, representing 73 percent of all registered voters, cast ballots for the Anschluss. Nevertheless, the Christian Social government of the Province of Styria stuck to its guns, whereupon Mayr resigned on 1 July 1920. It thus became obvious that different policies would have to be pursued to keep the state from sinking into an even greater crisis.

It is clear that the motives of the Anschluss movement in the provinces—above all in Tyrol and Salzburg—differed from those of the movement that emerged in postwar Vienna. These were provinces with conservative majorities who had nothing in common with either the Viennese or the German Socialists. There was no longer talk of Anschluss under the banner of socialism. Germany had not gone socialist, and the Soviet Republic in Bavaria had been a fleeting episode. On the other hand, in light of the desperate economic straits, a financial "merger" with that larger country did seem promising; thus, the word "Anschluss" was now avoided at all costs. The provinces wanted to be done once and for all with "red, Jewified" Vienna, and they did not hold this Republic of Austria in very high regard either. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in a letter written on 25 May 1921 to Chancellor Mayr by Richard Steidle, the influential leader of the Tyrolean *Heimatwehr* (as the conservatives' *Heimwehr* home defense force was called there) who in 1940 lost his life in the Buchenwald concentration camp. In his view, the decisive element in the attitude of the population of Tyrol was "above all the wish to get rid of the whole despised 'Vienna business,' which the people want nothing more to do with. This mood assumes dimensions that are tantamount to spitefulness, especially in religiously and nationalistically oriented circles, and I come across more and more people who openly express this opinion." Steidle ended the letter with his own unequivocal wish,

illustrating why the domestic affairs of this state could not possibly have settled down during the ensuing years. "Actually," Steidle wrote, "I shouldn't even tell you all this because, as far as my own personal opinion is concerned, there's nothing I long for more than the elimination of this ridiculous state—along with the stink it gives off—and Tyrol being rid of Vienna for good."

Austria was not dissolved along with its "stink." Following a year-long interlude with Johannes Schober as chancellor, Prelate Ignaz Seipel, "the strongest non-Socialist personality, who had long been active behind the scenes," assumed the leadership of the government in May 1922 and remained in office until 1929. Seipel, a Christian Social, was certainly no proponent of the Anschluss, even though he never came out against it in public. His prime concern was to stabilize Austria without an Anschluss. When he took office, unemployment was over 20 percent, inflation was at its peak, and the system was on the verge of collapse. The end of Austria seemed to be near.

Seipel's tactic was to make the victorious powers responsible for subsequent developments, but at the same time to convince them that the preservation of Austria as a state was a vital necessity for Europe. In a stirring note dated 7 August 1922, he pleaded with British Prime Minister Lloyd George to arrange a loan for Austria. If this were not granted, then his government would have to convene the Austrian Parliament and to declare in concurrence with it that neither the current government nor any other one is in a position to carry on the administration of this country. Furthermore, they would see themselves forced to state, before the Austrian people and international public opinion, that the powers of the Entente were responsible for the collapse of one of the oldest centers of civilization in the heart of Europe, and to lay the fate of Austria in the hands of those powers.

In the end, these efforts did bring forth a loan from the League of Nations for over 650 million gold Crowns, under conditions like those imposed on Third World countries nowadays. Seipel accepted these conditions in the Geneva Protocols signed on 4 October 1922. In Protocol Number 1, the Republic of Austria pledged for the next twenty years, "in accordance with the wording of Article 88 of the Treaty of St. Germain, to not relinquish its independence; it will

refrain from any actions, and abstain from any and all economic or financial ties that might possibly diminish its independence either directly or indirectly." However, Austria maintained its freedom with respect to tariff, trade, and financial agreements "and all general affairs having to do with its economic system and trade relations."

In light of the subsequent course of events, it is particularly interesting that Great Britain, France, Italy, and Czechoslovakia pledged to preserve the "political independence, the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Austria." Without a doubt, Austria had to make enormous sacrifices for this financial aid, but this was obviously the only course it could take towards economic rehabilitation. Even the proponents of Pan-Germanism concurred in this and approved of Seipel's policies, though this was not the case with the Social Democrats, who had been in the opposition since July 1920. What a Christian Social termed the chancellor's "great deed" was for Social Democrats "high treason" for which Seipel deserved only scorn.

Stage Three: Anschluß Propaganda and Practical Alignment Policies Pursued in the 1920s

As economic retrenchment efforts got underway with the help of the League of Nations loan, the Anschluß began to lose its current relevance among large segments of the population since it appeared unlikely to come about in the foreseeable future. But that changed beginning around 1925 when the economic situation worsened once again. Even the Pan-Germans, for whom the Anschluß was above all an ideological and nationalistic postulate, now placed economic considerations in the foreground and demanded the Anschluß as a "necessity for trade and economic policies." A resolution passed at their 1925 party convention stated that it was evident "that the stabilization of our domestic economy cannot be accomplished without unification with the German economic sphere." In addition, 1925 also marked the beginning of organized propaganda campaigns conducted by "working groups" and "peoples' associations" that were tolerated by the government in Vienna and financially supported by Berlin. Intellectuals and politicians joined together in the *Österreichisch-deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and its counterpart in Germany, the *Deutsch-österreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für das Reich*. These working groups took a primarily "scholarly"

approach to the Anschluß issue; they published a wide variety of articles and texts, put out their own newspapers, put on "Austrian Weeks" from 1929 on, and were surprisingly influential.

In addition, there were associations for the general public, the *Österreichisch-deutscher Volksbund Berlin* and the *Österreichisch-deutscher Volksbund Wien*, which quickly attracted several hundred thousand members and disseminated Anschluß propaganda among the public at large. One of their most impressive public events was the Tenth German Choral Union Festival held in Vienna in 1928. In his address, the president declared: "Our soul thirsts for this Greater Germany, but our rational mind tells us that we can only do the work in preparation for this. We want to go about this work with the power and enthusiasm that flows from the German song." A third important organization was the Delegation for Austrian-German Economic Unification, which was founded in 1927 and within a short time included more than 140 member associations in almost all sectors of the economy. Thereafter, demands for this economic amalgamation were asserted more loudly and more frequently across the industrial and commercial spectrum, including the executive committee of the Chamber of Commerce, leaders of the coal and iron industry (the chairman of the committee for heavy industry, Apold, stated: "For us, the Anschluß is an economic necessity of the highest order. This must come about!"), the Farm Bureau, and the Lower Austrian Chamber of Agriculture. Simultaneously, German capital continued to penetrate the Austrian economy without a great deal of fuss being made about it. The best example of this was the 1926 takeover of the *Alpine Montanwerke* mining operation by the *Vereinigten Stahlwerke* steel company. Nevertheless, this penetration did not reach the level that had been anticipated.

Meanwhile, in the fields of transportation, culture, and jurisprudence, practical efforts to harmonize the two systems were underway. Thus, as early as 1925, visa requirements were abolished and postal service agreements were reached; in 1926, dull green was even replaced as the color of the Austrian *Bundesheer's* uniforms by German army gray; in 1927, a unified law regulating guardianship and probate law was passed; and in 1930, an agreement on the use of each other's patents was signed. In the same year, standardized rules for insurance companies went into effect in both countries. One year

before, common railway traffic regulations had been implemented, and legal scholars were working together to update and re-issue their penal codes. In 1928, a German-Austrian exchange program for government officials was initiated, and a conference of the deans of German and Austrian universities was held in Frankfurt that year as well. Shortly thereafter, the Universities of Vienna and Berlin recognized each other's diplomas as academically equivalent.

Even with all these activities, the bottom line was that this approach was not effective politically in bringing about an *Anschluß*. For one thing, existing treaties and Seipel's policies did not permit such a thing; for another, the *Anschluß* was not at this time a high-priority German political objective, although it was kept on the back burner for future consideration. Gustav Stresemann, foreign minister from 1923 to 1929, described the larger context of this issue from the German perspective in a secret memorandum he prepared in January 1925 for the cabinet. The object of "German hope" in his view was "the creation of a state the political borders of which encompass all the German peoples living within the contiguous area of German settlement in Central Europe and who wish to be connected to the Reich." This was nothing other than the Central Europe concept from World War I, especially since in this Central European Reich "besides our fellow Germans, members of other foreign ethnic groups would also become subject to German dominion" because this Reich would otherwise be impossible to bring into existence.

A study conducted in March 1926 for the German Army's general staff made clear the military's take on this situation; in it, the "*Anschluß* of *Deutschösterreich*" (!) was foreseen as Stage Three, with, indeed, a lower priority than Stage One: "liberation of the Rheinland and the Saar region" and Stage Two: "elimination of the corridor and reacquisition of Polish Upper Silesia" but, nevertheless, higher on the agenda than "elimination of the demilitarized zone."

In any case, Berlin had not forgotten about Austria during its climb back to major power status. In going about this, Germany was careful to avoid doing anything that might be detrimental to the *Anschluß* movement in Austria itself. Thus, the government of the Reich refused to recognize the Brenner border, and made no reference to South Tyrol that could be interpreted as their approval of the *status quo*.

Stage Four: The Customs Union Project of 1931

Germany's Austrian policy was then revived under Stresemann's successor, Julius Curtius. There were several reasons for this.

First, further deterioration of economic conditions in Austria, particularly in the textile and iron and metal processing industries, played a key role. In late 1929, the downturn also hit the electrical, leather and shoe, and chemical sectors, while sales and prices of farm products continued to plunge. In 1930, the crisis and the depression caused by the 1929 collapse of the *Bodenkreditanstalt* spread throughout the economy. Almost all industrial sectors cut back on production, which, in turn, led to a sharp rise in unemployment. In the opinion of Johannes Schober, who took over as chancellor again in September 1929, Austria was not in a position to manage a financial and economic turnaround on its own; only the *Anschluß* with a larger neighboring economy could help solve its problems. Curtius meant to see to it that this would be the German Reich and not, for instance, the Danube Federation being proposed by the Czechoslovakian foreign minister.

Second, the growing influence of the *Heimwehr* in Austria also affected the revival of Germany's Austria policy. The *Heimwehr* was a militant, anti-Marxist movement, an assemblage of nationalistic and conservative forces of all stripes whose political influence was growing steadily. It rejected the democratic republic—which it characterized as "red"—and wanted to replace it with an authoritarian state. The danger that this might pose to the *Anschluß* movement was clear. Thus, Count Hugo Lerchenfeld, the German envoy in Vienna, reported to Berlin on 21 November 1929 that a total victory of the *Heimwehr* would be tantamount to the accession of a semi-fascist dictatorship. This, in turn, would mean that Austria would establish solid ties to the Italian-Hungarian bloc, and would thereby very seriously threaten the development of German-Austrian relations.

Third, Aristide Briand's plan for Europe was a key influence. At the League of Nations meeting held in September 1929, French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand proposed the creation of a *lien fédéral* among the peoples of Europe. This federative association was designed as a *lien de solidarité* linking together the European states. Putting this plan into effect would solidly establish the political and

territorial *status quo* in Europe, and would have simultaneously meant the end of German revision policies and Germany as a great power. But this Germany's autonomy and power was precisely what Berlin did not want to allow to become endangered through its integration into the proposed "New European Order." On 8 June 1930, Chancellor Brüning made it clear to his cabinet that Germany had to have "sufficient natural *Lebensraum*." Curtius pointed out that the German answer "will be a first-class funeral for Briand's initiative, but would, on the other hand, also have to serve German foreign policy as a platform for the ongoing pursuit of its political and economic goals."

The pursued goal was the elevation of Germany to the status of a major power in the Danube Basin. The springboard for this was, logically, Austria. "Union with Austria," according to a paper prepared by the Foreign Office on 7 July 1930, "ought to be the highest priority task on the German policy agenda, since an Austria belonging to Germany could open up totally new possibilities to influence and determine developments in the southeast in accordance with Germany's interests." The first step in that direction was to be the customs union. It was expected that Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Rumania would be forced to follow suit. Then, once economic relations with the Baltic States were improved, the Poles would be caught in a vice, and it would be possible to offer them economic aid in exchange for political concessions (that is, redrawing the German-Polish border). A "pan-European cloak" was to be draped over the entire undertaking, as Secretary of State von Bülow of the Foreign Office formulated it in January 1931.

The insistence on the part of the Germans—from Curtius above all—was too much for Schober to resist. The negotiations were then conducted under the utmost secrecy until a treaty draft was finalized, but an indiscretion put an end to the confidentiality and led to a rushed announcement of the project on 21 March 1931. It may be assumed that the leak came from Vienna since—and this is the interesting thing about it—resistance started to emerge on the Austrian side just as it finally started to look like there really would be an economic union. This resistance emerged in the machinery sector, the chemical industry, heavy manufacturing, the garment industry, agriculture and forestry, and even among the piano makers.

Across the commercial spectrum, businessmen were pointing to Austria's technological backwardness and the resulting structural disadvantages in competition with German industry.

There is still no definitive answer to the question of whether there was collaboration between these circles, Christian Social politicians, and the French government during the following weeks. France felt—and rightly so—that it had been deceived by the German government, and now pulled out all the stops, including issuing an ultimatum to the Austrian government, to bring about the project's downfall. Then, beginning in May 1931, a banking crisis in Austria and Germany was piled on top of this crisis of political confidence, and in September 1931, both the German and Austrian sides officially renounced the project.

As Renner later wrote, the events and circumstances surrounding the project placed the Anschluss issue "in a very dangerous way once again on Austria's current agenda, and aroused nationalist passions from which Hitler's movement would ultimately benefit the most." Soon, a parliamentary majority government was not even possible anymore. Finally, the League of Nations forfeited "the hard-earned goodwill it had enjoyed among most segments of the Austrian population."

In Germany, the domestic political crisis in which the republic was embroiled was considerably exacerbated by the project, and Weimar would not be able to surmount these difficulties. Moreover, there were foreign policy consequences. The whole undertaking was "truly German foreign policy's fall from grace, a challenge issued to the European state system, and a poorly calculated one at that." The concept of international cooperation and the ideas of Geneva were finally laid to rest. A development began to emerge that, in a very short time, would prove to have disastrous consequences for all powers involved. The Customs Union project was thus a station of "historical significance" along this path of estrangement, and "laid the first charge for the coming European explosion." For Germany, that meant Hitler; for Austria, Dollfuss.

Stage Five: Hitler in Power—The Failure of the "Quick Solution" in 1933-34

The Nazis' seizure of power in 1933 added a new element to the previously mentioned political, economic, and military

considerations on the German side of the Anschluß question—namely, raising *völkisch*-nationalistic racial thinking to a position of paramount importance. On the very first page of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler voiced his demand: “German-Austria must be restored to the great German motherland, and, indeed, not on the basis of any economic calculation whatsoever. No, no—even if this union were a matter of economic indifference, even if it were disadvantageous, it must take place nonetheless. People of the same blood belong together in the same Reich.”

This was precisely the line that Nazi propaganda pursued up to March 1938, although those disseminating it successfully concealed the fact that precisely this aspect of Nazi Anschluß policy was assuming ever-diminishing importance. Hitler’s concept of world domination attributed almost exclusively military-strategic and economic significance to the Anschluß of Austria. Nowhere was that expressed as clearly as in his famous speech delivered on 5 November 1937 to the commanders of the various branches of the *Wehrmacht*, in which he announced his “irrevocable decision . . . to solve the German territorial question by 1943 to 1945 at the latest.” Here, Austria was put on a par with Czechoslovakia; Hitler stated that his primary objective was “to subjugate Czechoslovakia and, simultaneously, Austria,” and he referred to “attacking Czechoslovakia and Austria.” The Anschluß was the first precondition for the creation of “Greater Germany,” which, in turn, was one of the preconditions for the implementation of his foreign policy program.

In 1933-34, Hitler launched the effort—obviously in the hope of being able to take advantage of the Nazi movement’s momentum—to bring about the Anschluß in the fastest way possible. He named Theodor Habicht, a top Nazi party (NSDAP) official in Vienna, as his “special delegate” for Austrian affairs, and from this point on terrorist attacks by Austrian Nazis were the order of the day. When Engelbert Dollfuss, who had been presiding over an authoritarian system since March 1933 when the Parliament dissolved itself, expelled the Bavarian Minister of Justice and *Reichsjustizkommissar* Frank from Austria in May 1933, Hitler reacted with the so-called thousand Mark barrier: henceforth, every German who wished to travel to or through Austria had to pay in advance the outrageously

high “fee” of 1,000 Reichsmarks. This measure dealt a staggering blow to the Austrian tourist industry, but Hitler’s expectations, as formulated at a cabinet meeting on 26 May 1933, were not fulfilled: “This measure can be expected to lead to the collapse of the Dollfuss government and to new elections. These new elections will bring about the internal *Gleichschaltung* of Austria, and thus eliminate the necessity of an external Anschluß. . . . The struggle will be decided this summer.”

Dollfuss reacted in June by banning the activities of the NSDAP. Nazi economic warfare and terror were carried on even more intensively, but without producing the success for which Hitler had hoped. The Pan-Germanists could be counted on to support an Anschluß under Nazi conditions, but not the Social Democrats and the Christian Socials, who had by then eliminated the Anschluß paragraphs from their platforms. Nevertheless, at this point no joint defensive front was organized, nor was an effort made to invoke consciousness of an Austrian identity because the land was already divided into irreconcilable “camps,” and Dollfuss had established a regime that calculatedly accepted as a fact of life a situation that had already reached its first climax with the Ministry of Justice fire in July 1927.

In 1977, the Viennese *Arbeiter-Zeitung* published a retrospective look at those events that stated:

15 July 1927 claimed more human lives than the revolution of 1918-19, and not that many fewer than February 1934. It is the key event of the First Republic, the pivotal episode between democracy and fascism. On this bloody Friday, a lot more was left in ruins than the Ministry of Justice alone—the working class lost its trust in Austria as a state founded upon the rule of law, and Social Democrats lost their faith in the omnipotence of their organization. The dismissal of Parliament in 1933 and the dissolution of Social Democracy in 1934 were only the final upshots of this great defeat of the young democracy.

In February 1934, four days of civil war-like fighting pitted the *Heimwehr*, the military and the police against armed Austrian Social Democratic workers. There were hundreds of fatalities, and nine workers were executed. These events were never forgotten; from

then on, the shadows of those dead were cast over all that came about afterwards.

In the process of revamping the state in accordance with the fascist model—in return for a vague promise from the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini to defend Austria's independence by force of arms—Dollfuss did a thorough job. The Social Democratic Party, the independent unions, and the workers' athletic and cultural associations were dissolved and their assets confiscated. Dollfuss was now waging a two-front war against the Nazis and the Social Democrats. In the "corporatist state" that was now set up, nearly two-thirds of the population were denied any say about what that new state would be like, while in the Nazi's Third Reich, the "community of the *Volk*" was being propagated. With such policies, overcoming the idea of Anschluss was condemned to failure since, as Gerhard Botz has emphasized, "[T]he image of independent Austrian men and women as the better Germans was still associated with German nationalism, and from this point of departure—as it actually transpired during the final years of the corporatist state—it could be undermined by the Nazis."

Hitler's attempt at a "quick solution" ended with the *putsch* by the Austrian Nazis on 25 July 1934. Even if there had been no orders from Hitler to go ahead with the *putsch*, the ultimate responsibility was in his hands. The *putsch* was poorly organized and, in the wake of the massacre of SA members in the Third Reich on 30 June, the severe tensions between the SA and the SS in Austria contributed significantly to its failure. Indeed, Dollfuss lost his life, but the *putsch* itself collapsed after a few hours in the face of determined resistance by the government and the army. The German government distanced itself from these proceedings, whereby Mussolini's decision to dispatch four divisions in the direction of Brenner and one to Carinthia played a considerable role in eliciting that reaction.

Stage Six: The "Evolutionary Solution" up to the Wehrmacht Marching into Austria on 12 March 1938

The events in Austria, together with Mussolini's "Watch on the Brenner," convinced Hitler that the time was not yet ripe for an Anschluss. Faced with this situation, Franz von Papen—now Hitler's special envoy in Vienna—argued in favor of an "evolutionary"

solution to this question, for the "mental saturation" of Austria: the land was to be undermined from within.

This policy played right into the hand of Dollfuss' successor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. He undertook nothing to reconcile the "camps" and to bring together the politically divided land. He purposefully pursued a "German way" with Austria as the second German state, and his economic policies saw to it that Austria was the European country with the highest relative unemployment rate. He oriented his foreign policy more and more on Italy. It is doubtful whether Papen's "evolution theory" alone could have ever led to success. In any case, among the most decisive factors were the foreign policy isolation and the growing dependence on Mussolini which Schuschnigg had engineered. With each step that Mussolini took to alienate the Western powers and to draw closer to Hitler (for example, the attack on Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War), his interest in an independent Austria subsided and Schuschnigg's latitude for action diminished. Thus, in early 1936, Mussolini let Berlin know that, for a guarantee of the Brenner border, he would have no objections to a treaty whereby Austria "although formally remaining an independent state, practically [would become] a satellite of Germany."

Simultaneously, Mussolini advised Schuschnigg to make a deal with Hitler in order to improve relations between Germany and Austria. The result was the "confidential gentlemen's agreement" of 11 July 1939 that Papen had long been pushing. Schuschnigg pledged to:

1. "conduct the Austrian government's foreign policy with due consideration of the peaceful endeavors of the German government's foreign policy," whereby it was not made clear what was meant by either "consideration" or "peaceful";
2. appoint Austrian Nazis "to positions of political responsibility"; and
3. cease his media campaign and propagandizing against Germany;
4. proclaim an amnesty.

Schuschnigg had no illusions about what he was getting into, but his aim was "to win time and to get relief from the German pressure for the moment," especially since his antagonist Hitler confirmed that

"Germany [has] neither the intention nor the desire to interfere in Austria's internal affairs, or in any way to effect the annexation of or unification with Austria."

However, with this agreement, Hitler had managed to get the decisive foot in the Austrian door. With the appointment of Edmund von Glaise-Horstenau, a National Socialist would be taking his place on the Austrian Council of Ministers, and the approximately 17,000 amnestied Nazis now intensified the struggle of the "movement" against the "system," while the land stood there without foreign policy protection as the "Berlin-Rome axis" took shape in the fall of 1936. That was when the macabre joke began making the rounds that this axis was the skewer on which Austria was going to be broiled to a golden brown.

In the fall of 1936, Germany began its four-year plan, and thus launched the phase of direct preparation for war. In this connection, Austria became increasingly important, and not for the above-cited reason mentioned by Hitler on page one of *Mein Kampf*, but rather on strategic and economic grounds. Thus it was no mere coincidence that Hermann Göring, as special delegate responsible for administering the four-year plan for re-armament, now became the driving force pushing for a fast Anschluss.

Austria was most enticing because of its unemployment at 600,000 including tens of thousands of highly skilled workers, much newly-built industrial capacity, and important natural resources—iron ore, timber, crude oil, and magnesite in particular. But most enticing of all were its monetary and foreign currency reserves that were desperately needed in light of Germany's catastrophic currency situation. Thus, at the end of 1937, the German Reichsbank's foreign currency holdings were a relatively paltry 90 million Reichsmarks, whereas the fabulous booty they got their hands on in March 1938 came to the equivalent of about 1.4 billion Reichsmarks. Instead of using the money on measures to stimulate employment so that the many jobless and all those whose unemployment benefits had run out would become supporters of the state, the Schuschnigg government had given top priority to the stability of the currency and had amassed foreign exchange. According to Schausberger,

[I]t was only [this booty] that imparted real world-class political weight to the dimensions and the significance of the redoubled German effort to bring on the Anschluss from late 1937 to early

1938. With the acquisition of Austria, the Third Reich could overcome its critical economic situation as well as maintaining the speed of its build-up and its arms-race lead of at least nine months.

At the end of 1937, Austria's domestic and foreign policy situation was almost hopeless. Mussolini, during his visit to Berlin in September 1937, had given Hitler a free hand with respect to Austria. Nor could any help be expected from the British after Lord Halifax—chairman of the Privy Council, confidant of Prime Minister Chamberlain and soon to be foreign minister—had let Hitler know on 19 November 1937 that, with respect to Danzig, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, England was only concerned "that these revisions be brought about by means of peaceful evolution, and that methods that might cause ongoing disruptions . . . be avoided." Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the fifth column of still-illegal National Socialists intensified its activities.

The dismissal of Generals Blomberg and Fritsch, and the shake-up at the top of the Foreign Office (Neurath replaced by Ribbentrop) in early February 1938 made it clear that Hitler was determined to take the first step on the path that he had elaborated on in the 5 November 1937 speech cited above, and in doing so was prepared to use force if necessary. Hitler now had absolute control over the *Wehrmacht*.

The significance of this development was not recognized at the time—neither in Austria nor by the opponents of this policy in Germany. Otherwise, Schuschnigg would hardly have consented to that meeting with Hitler on 12 February in Berchtesgaden that Papen and the Austrian Nazis had so cleverly arranged. If the Austrian chancellor had hoped to be able to clear up existing differences and to buy some time, then he got a rude awakening. Hitler dictated an ultimatum to Schuschnigg—a man not known for his nerves of steel in any case—whereby he had three days to conform Austria's foreign, military, economic, and press policies to those of Germany, to grant the National Socialists the freedom to engage in political activities and an amnesty, and to appoint one of their moderates, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, as minister of the interior with unlimited authority over the police. If he refused, Hitler threatened to send in the *Wehrmacht*—a bluff, since preparations for this move had not even begun.

Schuschnigg capitulated, especially since no outside assistance could be expected. Basically, this was already the beginning of the end, which then came even more quickly than expected. By this point, the smell of Anschluss was in the air, and a few days after Berchtesgaden, there began a wild flight of capital out of the country. On 20 February, Hitler gave an address that was eagerly awaited, especially in Austria, and was the first to be carried by the Austrian National Broadcasting Company—another consequence of Berchtesgaden. In his speech, Hitler did not utter even a single word about Austria's independence; rather, he pointed out how unbearable it was for a major power to know that there were members of its own ethnic group alongside it who, because of their love for the people as a whole and their sense of attachment to its fate and its worldview, were being subjected to terrible and prolonged suffering.

Numerous listeners reacted accordingly; in many parts of Austria, Hitler's speech was followed by Nazi demonstrations, celebrations, and rallies. "In Vienna, the red-white-red banner was ripped from its mast at City Hall and the swastika flag raised in its place; many in Graz felt that the 'Third Reich had broken out already,' and the federal police force, now under the command of Seyß-Inquart, did not intervene."

Schuschnigg responded on 24 February; in a major policy address before the legislature, he declared that his utmost duty was "to preserve [the] undiminished freedom and independence of the Austrian fatherland. . . . We know very well that there is a limit to how far you can go, that there comes a point where it is clearly posted 'This far and no further!' . . . Red-white-red to the death! Austria!" This could also be interpreted as meaning that Austria would be prepared to fight to maintain its independence. There were then demonstrations in support of this course, and corresponding Nazi counter-demonstrations.

On 2 March in Linz, Seyss-Inquart reviewed a parade of the outlawed SA, giving the marchers the Nazi salute as they passed. The event turned into a Nazi demonstration that ended with chants of "One people, one Reich!" "*Sieg Heil!*" and "Arise Germany, down with the Jews!" Similar demonstrations followed throughout the country, and the situation grew more critical from day to day. Schuschnigg attempted to launch a desperate offensive meant to

regain the momentum, and thereby triggered the final act of this drama himself. Echoing the historic call-to-arms of heroic Tyrolean freedom fighter Andreas Hofer, "*Mander, 's ischt Zeit!*" (Men, the time has come!), he announced at a meeting of the *Vaterländische Front* on 9 March in Innsbruck his intention to hold a plebiscite on Sunday, 13 March. It was to be entitled "For a free and German, independent and public-spirited, for a Christian and united Austria!" Even at this late date, Schuschnigg considered it imperative—despite the regrets of many of his supporters—to refer to a "German" Austria.

But the whole undertaking came too late. In light of the political course pursued over the previous four years, it was an act of desperation that was also, as Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano noted, a "bomb" destined "to explode in [Schuschnigg's] hands." There was good reason why Mussolini had warned against such a step.

It is idle speculation to consider what would have happened if the plebiscite had taken place. Hitler and his minions had a clear idea of how plebiscites held by dictatorships were designed to come out, and they had good reason to fear that Schuschnigg might well have gotten a majority, even if—or perhaps precisely because—there were no lists of eligible voters (since no general elections had taken place during the previous eight years).

Essentially, 10-12 March were days marked by chaos in Vienna; there was total confusion as to who had political clout and who was officially in charge of what. Certainly, 11 March was the decisive day. The chronology of the key events has subsequently become known for the most part, and can be briefly summarized as follows. On the morning of 10 March, Hitler reacted to Schuschnigg's speech by ordering preparations for "Operation Otto," the invasion of Austria, which was set for 12 March. At 6:30 p.m., the corresponding mobilization order was issued. Glaise-Horstenau, who happened to be in Germany at the time, was ordered to return to Vienna immediately and to deliver to Schuschnigg an ultimatum to postpone the plebiscite. The success of this ballot question seemed to be assured when, on the morning of 11 March, the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Socialists addressed the following appeal to the working class of Austria:

Workers, Comrades! Schuschnigg's plebiscite confronts you with the decision to either vote "yes" or to help Hitler's fascists take power. A victory by Hitler's fascists means not only the bloody repression and unrestrained exploitation of Austrian workers; it also poses a threat to the entire world. Austrian workers therefore cannot answer Schuschnigg's question with "no." . . . This coming Sunday is not the day on which we will settle the score with Austrian fascism, and call the authoritarian regime to account for the crimes it has committed against the workers since February 1934 by voting against Schuschnigg. This coming Sunday, we're voting against Hitler's fascists. On that day, the whole working class must vote "yes."

This was followed that very same day by three ultimatums delivered by the Austrian Nazis in Vienna—each after consultations with Berlin.

First, at 10:00 a.m., Seyss-Inquart and Glaise-Horstenau peremptorily demanded that Schuschnigg cancel the plebiscite; otherwise, they threatened to resign, which would have constituted a breach of the Berchtesgaden Agreement and given Hitler official grounds to intervene militarily. Schuschnigg accepted at 11:30 a.m. At 1:00 p.m., Hitler signed Directive Nr. 1 for the attack on March 12. It read in part:

If other means prove fruitless, I intend to send armed forces into Austria to restore constitutional conditions there and put a stop to further acts of violence against those segments of the population displaying the convictions of true Germans. I will be in command of the entire operation. . . . The army's initial objective is to occupy Upper Austria, Salzburg, Lower Austria, and Tyrol, to quickly take Vienna, and to secure the Austrian-Czech border. . . . It is in our interest that the entire operation proceed without resorting to violence as a peaceful occupation welcomed by the population. . . . If resistance is encountered, however, it is to be ruthlessly broken with armed force.

Second, a few minutes after 1:00 p.m., Seyss-Inquart delivered his second ultimatum. The cabinet was to resign by 5:30 p.m., and he would appoint a new one. Almost simultaneously, the Nazis began to

take over power in the cities and provinces, as the old regime collapsed virtually without resistance. When diplomatic queries undertaken in Paris, London, and Rome made it clear that no help could be expected from there in this situation, Schuschnigg resigned at 4:00 p.m.

The third ultimatum, this time addressed to President Wilhelm Miklas, arrived shortly thereafter. He had until 7:30 p.m. to appoint Seyss-Inquart as the new chancellor or else German troops would march in. While Miklas was still refusing to accept the ultimatum, Schuschnigg capitulated once and for all. At 8:00 p.m., via radio, he bade farewell to his countrymen, and made public the ultimatum and the German threat to send in troops:

The president has called upon me to inform the Austrian people that we are yielding to force. Because we fervently wish, even now, in this desperate hour, to avoid at any price the spilling of German blood, we have given our armed forces the order that, in case of an attack by German troops, they are to withdraw without resistance. . . . *Gott schütze Österreich!* (God protect Austria!)

The *Bundesheer* was instructed that "not a shot was to be fired" if German troops marched into Austria, and "their own troops were to pull back to the east."

Instead of considering the issue of how troops in Vorarlberg and Tyrol were supposed to withdraw "to the east," one should consider the more interesting and more frequently posed questions are: "Why was no order issued to put up military resistance? What would have happened if it had been?" The latter question cannot be answered by historians, and the only serious response that can be given to the former is that in the concrete situation that existed on 11-12 March immediately before and after the takeover of power by the National Socialists, there was absolutely no political basis on which to issue or to carry out such an order; furthermore, the Austrian leadership did not wish to spill "German blood." In such a discussion about the possibility of resistance, the wish is often father to the thought. The political will for such a step was absent, there no longer existed a functional government, the troops had been infiltrated by "illegal elements" (that is, National Socialists), and the Nazis had practically assumed power already throughout the whole country.

In the meantime, the National Socialists were already taking over the provincial governments—first of all in Tyrol, which reported to Vienna at 9:00 p.m. that power was in the Nazis' hands. Miklas named Seyss-Inquart the new chancellor at 11:00 p.m. Although the Austrian Nazis' victory was thus complete, this changed nothing with respect to Directive Nr. 2 signed by Hitler at 8:45 p.m. ordering the invasion to begin at daybreak on 12 March. The last bit of uncertainty as far as Hitler was concerned was cleared up late that evening when Rome gave the word that Mussolini had no objections to the move.

The jubilation and enthusiasm displayed by the Austrians as German troops marched into their country on the morning of 12 March exceeded all expectations on the German side and contributed to Hitler's decision to immediately go ahead with a complete Anschluss without waiting for the transitional phase that had been foreseen initially. It was left up to Seyss-Inquart on 13 March as the final act of his two-day term as chancellor to sign into law the "Reunification of Austria with the German Reich," whereby Article 1, stating that "Austria is a land of the German Reich," fatefully recalled the events of 1918, although this time everything had turned out much differently.

Besides the enthusiastic celebrations, expressions of support, hope for better times, and much opportunism, there were also those Austrians who did not approve of what was going on in those days; nevertheless, they remained largely inconspicuous in order to avoid the clutches of Himmler's henchmen, so that what remained were the images of jubilation and Hitler on *Heldenplatz*. In places where there was still skepticism, an unprecedented propaganda campaign was conducted—not without the active involvement of Austrians—during the weeks leading up to the plebiscite held on 10 April. The Catholic bishops expressed their delight "that the activities of the National Socialist movement would avert the threat of cataclysmic, godless Bolshevism" and wanted to give "their blessings and best wishes for these activities in the future"; Cardinal Innitzer signed off with "Heil Hitler." Karl Renner declared on 2 April:

Although not brought about by the methods which I advocate, the Anschluss has nevertheless been completed, it is a historical fact, and this I regard as genuine satisfaction for the

humiliations of 1918 and 1919, for St. Germain and Versailles. . . . As a Social Democrat and thus as a proponent of a nation's right to self-determination, as the first chancellor of the Republic of Austria, I will vote "yes."

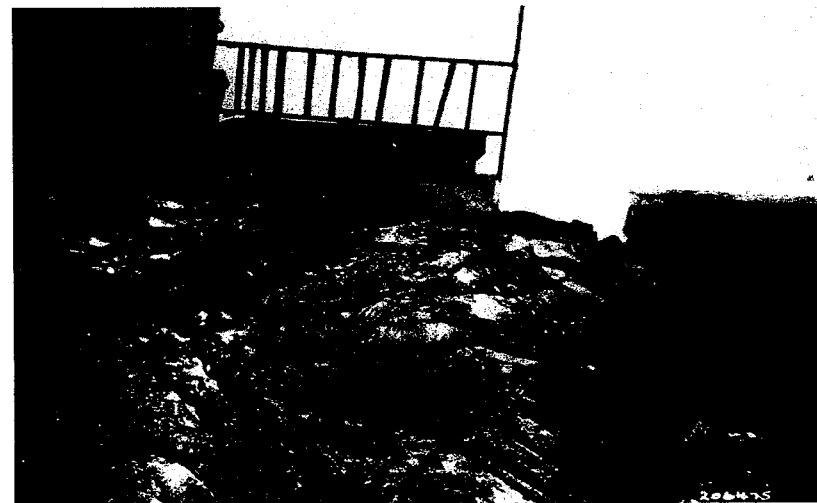
With testimonials like these, how many Catholics or Socialists were going to vote "no"? Indeed, that is how it turned out. To the question "Do you agree with the reunification of Austria with the German Reich that was carried out on 13 March 1938, and do you cast your vote for the list of candidates of our Führer Adolf Hitler?" there were 4,453,772 (99.73 percent) "yes" votes, 11,929 "no" votes, and 5,776 invalid ballots in Austria. (In Germany, where the plebiscite was combined with a *Reichstag* election, there were 44,362,667 (99.02 percent) votes for and 440,429 against.) In assessing these results, we may well proceed under the assumption that massive election fraud did not take place. Actually, under these circumstances, it was not even necessary.

But for many Austrians, it did not take long for disillusionment to set in. Hitler had never particularly cared for the Austrian Nazis, so it was Nazis from the "old Reich" who took over the leading positions in Austria. It was certainly significant that among the passengers aboard the first plane to land in Vienna on 12 March (at 4:30 a.m.) were Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer* SS and head of the German police, and SS-*Gruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Service (SD). By December, approximately 21,000 persons had been taken into "protective custody." There were systematic terror, acts of revenge, and outbreaks of horrible anti-Semitic violence—only possible because anti-Semitism was so deeply rooted in a long tradition. "With their bare hands," an eyewitness recalled, university professors had to scrub the streets; pious, bearded Jews were dragged into the Temple and forced by howling young goons to do deep knee-bends while shouting in unison 'Heil Hitler.' They rounded up innocent people on the street like rabbits and marched them to the SA barracks to clean the toilets. Every sick, filthy, hate-filled fantasy that had been the object of countless nights' orgiastic longings was now raging in broad daylight.

The name *Österreich* and the traditions of that country were soon eradicated. Austria first became the *Ostmark*, and then the *Alpen- und Donaugau* (Alpine and Danubian administrative districts). From the heights of its rich culture, it sank into provincialism. Those who had voted "yes" on 10 April had doubtlessly not intended this, to say nothing of a war. Indeed, most Austrians involved in this war did their "duty" to the bitter end, but to them can also be applied what Adolf Schärf, Social Democrat and later Austrian president, recounts having said to a representative of the German resistance in the spring of 1943: "The Anschluß is dead. The Austrians have had their love for the German Reich driven out of them."

II. WORLD WAR II

Gusen concentration camp slave laborers who perished in the final days of the war before the American liberation of Upper Austria.



Source: National Archives, College Park, MD (#206475)