A hideously complicated problem:
Anglo-American relations with Austria,
1945-1955

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NOTE

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Chapter 1

'The Anschluss is dead': planning for post-war Austria

Anglo-American attitude to the Anschluss

In March 1938 Austria lost her political identity and became a mere province of Nazi Germany. Despite later accusations that the Austrians had welcomed their incorporation into the German Reich, this was in no sense true for the majority. Although many Austrian Socialdemocrats, among them Otto Bauer, the leader of the Austrian Socialdemocrats and Foreign Minister of the short-lived coalition government of 1919/1920, and Karl Renner, first Chancellor of the First Republic, had shared a vision of a Socialist German Central Europe after World War I, their enthusiasm for Anschluss faded in direct proportion as the Nazi menace overtook Germany. Even when the Christiansocial Government of 1931 took steps to circumvent the Western Powers' prohibition of Anschluss by trying to form a customs union with Germany, it was merely an attempt to overcome Austria's critical economic situation, and, although the Socialdemocrats gave the Government's scheme some qualified support at first, they soon changed their minds when the direction of Nationalsocialism became apparent.

Official British and American reaction to the forcible incorporation of Austria into Germany ranged from the United States Government's determination to avoid entanglement in European affairs to Winston Churchill's emphatic condemnation of the assault on Austria. Reactions less forthright than Churchill's were in part conditioned by events in Austria since 1933. In 1933, in an attempt to thwart Nationalsocialist and Socialdemocrat ambitions alike, the Christiansocial Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss - resentfully nicknamed 'Millimetternich' after his nineteenth century predecessor - suspended Parliament, outlawed the NSDAP and Austria's Communist Party and proceeded to rule by emergency decree. Determined to replace the Republic's parliamentary democracy with a fascist corporate state after the Italian model, Dollfuss sought Mussolini's protection against Hitler's Germany and enlisted Austria's home-grown fascist organisation, the Heimwehr, against the Socialdemocrats. The Heimwehr, formed immediately after the end of the first world war,
was a sort of mercenary private army led by ex-officers of the Imperial Army who had a 'glowing hatred' for the young Republic and was financed by wealthy industrialists, bankers and land-owners.\footnote{J.Hindels, Der Weg zum 12. Feber 1934 (Vienna, 1984) p.13} Although there was a monarchist element present in the ideas of the Heimwehr, the mainspring for their hatred was both ideological and economic. During the short coalition government of Christiansocials and Socialdemocrats in the early 1920s the Socialdemocrats, by some inspired legislation financed by taxing the wealthy, had set in motion a process which soon made 'Red Vienna' the European showcase for social achievements.

The Heimwehr's counterpart was the Republican Defence Corps, or Schutzbund, formed by the Socialdemocrats in 1923 in response to attacks on their members and institutions by the fascists. The Defence Corps was aptly named. Although there had been serious clashes between the two organisations in the 1920s, the Socialists' repeated successes at the municipal elections – Vienna with nearly a third of Austria's total population was their stronghold – seduced the Socialist leadership into believing that this success would eventually be matched by nationwide electoral victory and that Socialdemocracy would conquer the rest of Austria democratically and without bloodshed. The results of the National Assembly elections of 1930 demonstrated that theirs was no mere pipe-dream. Although they had failed to gain an absolute majority, they had emerged as the largest political party in Austria. Instead of translating their electoral success into political power, however, the Socialists were rendered powerless by an alliance between the Chancellor and the Heimwehr.

Some months before the elections of 1930, in which the Socialists had been so successful, Heimwehr members had sworn a solemn oath to do away with political parties and Western parliamentarianism and to create the corporate state. Part of their tactics was to goad the Schutzbund into 'weekend civil wars'\footnote{Ibid., p.18} and so endear themselves to the Dollfuss Government for their supposed willingness to keep the civil peace. The Socialist leadership, well aware of the Government's hostility to their aims, preferred to risk disaffection in the ranks of their membership by preaching restraint than give
Dollfuss an excuse to suppress them. Dollfuss, however, was not prepared to stand by and see the Socialists ruin his dream by parliamentary successes. At the beginning of February 1934 he prepared to smash the Socialists. At the same time as the leaders of the Heimwehr demanded the removal of all Socialists from provincial governments, city councils and town administrations, their troops conducted house-to-house searches for arms, arrested leaders of the Schutzbund and occupied Party premises. Linz, the capital of Upper Austria and a major industrial centre, erupted first. When the news of the fighting reached Vienna, the capital virtually exploded into civil war. It proved an uneven fight. For four days the Government's forces and its fascist storm-troopers bombarded workers and their families in their housing blocks where they had barricaded themselves and were fighting back with old rifles, very little ammunition, kitchen-knives, irons and such like. While the fighting raged in most of Austria's industrial centres and in the workers' districts of Vienna, Government forces occupied Vienna City Hall and unceremoniously ousted the elected Council members. Otto Bauer, leading light of Austromarxism, could only mourn the demise of the 'proudest citadel of Austrian Socialdemocracy'. Nor did Dollfuss show mercy once the Socialists were defeated. Even while the fighting still raged, the first Republican - too badly wounded to walk - was carried in a litter to the gallows. Twenty-one of the Republicans were immediately condemned to death, persecution of others would follow later. Only international demonstrations of sympathy for the Republicans forced Dollfuss to abandon further executions. Even so, according to one estimate, at least 2,000 men, women and children were killed or wounded, most of them civilians and Schutzbund members. The Dollfuss Government outlawed the Socialist Party, disbanded the trade unions and all other organisations of the workers' movement, and those leaders who were not executed were imprisoned or driven into exile. After 1945, Austrian governments, bitter at the treatment meted out to Austria, would remind their

3 O.Bauer, Der Aufstand der oesterreichischen Arbeiter (Prague, 1934) p.3
4 E.Holtmann, Zwischen Unterdrueckung und Befriedung: Sozialistische Arbeiterbewegung und autoritaeres Regime in Oesterreich 1933-1938 (Munich, 1978) p.95
occupiers that they had been the first to offer armed resistance to fascism.

In the light of American insistence after the second world war that the Socialists form part of an Austrian coalition government, it is useful to examine the American attitude to the Austrian civil war. Whereas the Socialists identified Austrofascism as equally harmful as National Socialism to their vision of a democratic republic, to the Americans Dollfuss appeared in a rather different light. He was seen as the brave little man who with his 'Fatherland Front' organisation was inspiring the Austrians with a new-found nationalism which was weaning them from their desire for union with Germany. He had outlawed the NSDAP and seemed determined to keep the Nazis at bay. The reports to the State Department by the US Charge d'affaires in Austria, Alfred Kliefoth, were full of admiration for the 'vigorous and efficient suppression' of the Socialist revolt. According to Kliefoth, the Austrian Government would now be free to concentrate the fight on 'the only remaining front, the Nazis, who remained completely in the background and are cowed by the events'.

His only concern was with the 'unfriendly' British and Socialist press which was driving Austria into Italy's arms, and part of the American press - those 'violent pro-Nazi and anti-American Socialists and radicals' - upsetting the Austrian Chancellor with their attacks on him.

While the State Department's representatives in Vienna thus applauded Dollfuss' action against the Socialists and overlooked the undemocratic character of his policies, the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was less impressed with Austria's mini-version of the Italian dictator. When the American Minister in Austria, George Earle, proposed to issue a statement extolling the 'magnificent courage' and 'fine clemency' shown by Dollfuss, Hull told him to stick to an analysis of economic conditions instead.

In July the Nazis, who were by no means as 'cowed' by the Austrian Chancellor as

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5 Alfred Kliefoth to Cordell Hull, 13 February 1934, _Foreign Relations of the United States 1934 Volume II: Europe, Near East and Africa_ (Washington, 1951) p.11; volumes from this series will henceforth be cited as _FRUS_ with year and volume number.

6 Kliefoth to Hull, 15 February 1934, _ibid._, pp.14-17

7 Hull to George Earle, 28 February 1934, _ibid._, pp.20-21
Kliefoth would have it, murdered Dollfuss in an attempted putsch. Incorrigibly, the US Minister hoped that Dollfuss' 'martyrdom' would at least for a while maintain the Dollfuss tradition in the Austrian Government, and he thought that Kurt von Schuschnigg, Dollfuss' successor, was the best man available. 8 Throughout this troubled period a profound sentiment, first formulated by Earle in November 1933 and emphatically endorsed by successive American diplomats in Europe, emerged: 'The peace of Europe depends on Austria's independence'. 9 Earle's successor in Vienna, George Messersmith, reminded his government of this evaluation after the Chancellor's assassination:

The settlement of the Austrian problem is essential to European peace, but it is not a problem the Austrian people can solve by themselves in spite of concrete and determined intentions. 10

Yet befogged by the disgust with Nationalsozialism, the Americans failed to consider the alternatives to Austrofascism. Instead of fighting Nationalsozialism with fascism and thus weakening the anti-Nazi front, they might have tried supporting the Austrian Socialists whose answer to Nazism was international socialism. Ironically, in 1934 the Americans chose to lend support to a minority fascist government which had declared war on half its citizens to fight Nazism, while after World War II they found it equally expedient to support and, indeed, insist upon a Conservative-Socialist coalition to fight Communism, even though the Conservatives, successors to the Christiansocials of Dollfuss' time, were in the majority.

It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if in 1934 the Christiansocials had formed an alliance with the Socialists, as they had in 1919 and as they would do again in 1945. The results of the National Assembly elections of 1930 would certainly have made such a choice logical. The Socialists had polled 41.1% to the Christiansocials' 35.7%; the rest had gone to various conservative groupings, the Nazis polling a mere 3%. With a determined coalition of Socialists and those elements in the conservative camp who were interested in the workers' welfare the Nazi lure might have

8 George Messersmith to Hull, 27 July 1934, ibid., p. 33
9 Earle to Pierrepont Moffat, 21 November 1933, ibid., p. 1
10 Messersmith to Hull, 28 July 1934, ibid., p. 33
been considerably less attractive to those Austrians who looked for better social conditions. In that case, too, the Socialists of Europe might have been less inclined to abandon Austria to Hitler. In the event, however, the Dollfuss regime preferred a 'patriotic alliance of convenience between Fascism and Catholicism' whose only identity of purpose was the destruction of Socialdemocracy.\textsuperscript{11} If to the Americans Schuschnigg seemed the best man to save Austria from Hitler's Germany, he was not equal to the task. By early 1938 Schuschnigg's regime, bounced like a ball between Mussolini's demand for more Fascism and Hitler's demand for more Nazism, had long lost its sovereignty through the 'silent occupation' of Austria's economy.\textsuperscript{12}

By February 1938 the fight was all but over. There was, as was almost invariably the case later during the Allied occupation of Austria, a marked difference in attitude between the US Government and its representatives in Austria. The US Charge d'affaires in Austria, John Wiley, showed compassion for Austria's plight and approval, even admiration, for Schuschnigg's fortitude in the face of Nazi pressure. Touched by Schuschnigg's description of his visit to Berchtesgaden as the 'most horrible day of his life', Wiley assured the Austrian Foreign Minister of his government's 'deep and sincere interest in the welfare of Austria' and its earnest hope that the Austrian Government would firmly resist threats against Austria's independence.\textsuperscript{13} The Secretary of State's reprimand was immediate and blunt:

\begin{quote}
You should very carefully avoid making any statements which can possibly be construed as implying that [the US Government] is involving itself, in any sense, in European questions of a purely political character or is taking any part, even indirectly, in the determination of such questions.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The German Ambassador, calling on Hull to explain the reasons for the assault on Austria, found Hull merely enquiring whether Germany's action would precipitate a war with Italy. Reassured by the Ambassador that there was no need for military hostilities 'since

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] \textit{Ibid.}, p.25
\item[14] Hull to Wiley, 15 February 1938, \textit{ibid.}, p.396
\end{footnotes}
the Austrian matter has been settled', Hull thanked him 'heartily' for this information.15

Despite this, the events of 11 and 12 March and the public outcry they provoked were not altogether without effect on the US Government. British and American press comments talked of the 'crassly brutal rape of a peaceful and inoffensive neighbour',16 'naked aggression',17 and 'open exhibition of overbearing force'.18 The US Charge soon dispelled any doubts about Austrian opposition to the Anschluss. Referring to the 'efficient terrorism' practised by the Nazis, his short-hand reports - 'Suicides continue' - conveyed a graphic picture of the horror that engulfed Austria.19 Yet, while Hull's reply to Wiley's report was openly emotional and seemed to be offering solace in the shape of a forthcoming US foreign policy statement,20 the statement, when it came, did not offer any real hope for Austria. Although Hull condemned a policy of isolation for the United States, the weapons with which America was to fight the 'rising tide of lawlessness' were purely rhetorical. Promising to safeguard America's 'legitimate interests in every part of the world' in every 'practical and peaceful way', it simply conveyed to the aggressors the message that America would not fight and that Austria was not yet one of its legitimate interests. Thus when the US Government at last formally responded to these events, it was not to protest but merely to acknowledge that a number of practical measures would have to be taken to adjust US relations with Austria to the new situation.21

The British Government, too, weakly acquiesced in Germany's annexation of Austria. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had been determined to pursue a 'hands off' policy concerning Austrian affairs. Even after Schuschnigg's encounter with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, when Austrian independence was so clearly threatened, the Foreign Office felt that anything other than a mild enquiry at

15 Memorandum by Hull, 12 March 1938, ibid., pp.428-29
16 New York Herald Tribune, 14 March 1938
17 Daily Herald, 14 March 1938
18 The Times, 14 March 1938
19 Wiley to Hull, 16 March 1938, FRUS 1938 I, p.449
20 Messersmith to Wiley, 16 March 1938, ibid., p.451
21 Hull to Hugh Wilson, 5 April 1938, ibid., p.473
Berlin would merely be 'leading the Austrians up the garden path'.

And on the eve of Hitler's invasion of Austria, the Foreign Secretary thought the Austrian Chancellor's determination to let the Austrian people decide whether or not they wanted to be part of the Third Reich 'foolish and provocative'.

Nevertheless, disagreement among British leaders over the Government's appeasement policy aside, Churchill's vigorous condemnation of the Anschluss and his insistence that Austria was a victim - 'brutally struck down' - was to be of fundamental importance to Austria after the war. Despite the fact that Austrians perforce became part of the German Wehrmacht, Churchill never deserted this concept of Austria as the first victim of Nazi aggression. Many of his speeches on the war, both before and after he became Prime Minister, contained references to the victimisation of Austria. Reporting on the state of the war in November 1939, for instance, he numbered Austria as one of the countries which would be 'rescued and restored to life and freedom' by a British victory over Nazi Germany. Again, a year later, he included Austria in a list of countries 'for whom we drew the sword' and whose liberation from the Nazi yoke was concomitant with British victory over Nazi Germany. Thus in June 1941 Eden, while also acknowledging the problem caused by the apparent welcome the annexation had received in Austria, pointed out that the Austrians could 'legitimately claim that their country was a victim of German aggression and was therefore in a similar position to other countries now suffering from German domination and oppression'. For the British planners the important conclusion drawn from this assessment was that the Austrians could be mobilised in the fight against Hitler's Germany. HMG had in fact received reliable reports that the Austrians were becoming increasingly hostile to the Nazi regime and the British were anxious to

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22 J. Harvey (ed), The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940 (London, 1970) p.90
23 Ibid., p.113
25 Broadcast on 'Ten Weeks of War', 12 November 1939, Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 11-18 November 1939, pp.3802-3803
26 Winston Churchill's Mansion House Speech, 9 November 1940, Keesing's, 9-16 November 1940, p.4316
27 Anthony Eden to HM Representatives in America, 18 June 1941, PREM 4/33/7
exploit this discontent by encouraging Austrian resistance to German domination.28

**Austrian emigre activities**

Why, then, did the British Government fail to make use of the Austrian emigre community in Britain? On 22 June 1941, four days after Eden’s statement, Hitler’s attack on Soviet Russia appeared to hand the British Government a convenient weapon in their endeavour, by bringing about the politicisation of the Austrian emigration and thus a possible focus for British anti-Nazi propaganda. Before this event, Austrian anti-Nazi emigres in Britain had so little in common that they had not been able to form a government-in-exile. They consisted of three main groups: the so-called Legitimists, the Socialists and the Communists.29 The Legitimists, a motley, politically weak group of monarchists and conservative-catholic elements, looked to the activities of Otto Habsburg in Paris, who, with the encouragement of the French foreign ministry and the US Ambassador, had tried to set up a government-in-exile there, an enterprise which failed for lack of support from the Austrian Socialists.30

The Socialists, too, initially had their headquarters in Paris, but would not, in any case, countenance co-operation with the Legitimists, whose victims they had been in the civil war in 1934, or the Communists whose Moscow-inspired line since the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact drove them into political isolation. It was not until after the fall of Paris and the wholesale flight of both Legitimists and Socialists to the United States that the Austrian Socialists in Britain gained strong leadership with the arrival of Oscar Pollak from Paris. This event, however, also failed to lead to co-operation with the strongest of the three groups, the Communists. On the contrary, Pollak’s organisation, the 'London Bureau of the Austrian Socialists in Great Britain', was characterised by an inflexible anti-Communism and a policy of 'ueberdauern', or simply surviving, the general calamity.31 There could be no question of

engaging in political activity: this had been ruled out by the Socialists in New York who, though fast becoming irrelevant to events in Europe, were still the acknowledged leaders of the Austrian Socialists in exile.

From the perspective of the post-war fate of Austria, moreover, there was an even more serious divergence of views between the two groups. Whereas the Communists' main object had from the very beginning in 1938 been to interest the British public in Austria's fight for freedom and independence, Pollak refused as late as October 1941 to abandon the Socialists' dream of a supra-national Socialist Europe in favour of 'deadly independence' for Austria. The occasion for Pollak's outburst had been an appeal by the 'Council of Austrians', an organisation established by the Communists in September 1938 as an ostensibly non-political representation of Austrian refugees in Britain. The Council of Austrians had appealed to all Austrian emigre groups to form a common political representation in an effort to organise, among other things, 'military and civil action by Austrians in the war against Hitler' and 'anti-Hitler propaganda'. The Communists, no longer hampered by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the 'Western-capitalist-war' line, could now openly come out in support of the Allied war effort and resume their attempts - in pursuit of post-1935 Comintern policy - at 'national front' building.

The result of the appeal was the creation of the Free Austrian Movement (FAM) in December 1941. As we have seen, the Socialist London Bureau refused to budge, causing a split in the Socialist camp and subsequent participation in the FAM by newly-formed dissident groups of Socialists. The Legitimists, on the other hand, although courted by the Communists merely for their 'fig-leaf function', merged their activities with the FAM - albeit without much enthusiasm - rather than be left out in the cold. What finally persuaded the Socialists in London to abandon their passivist line - without, however, co-operating with the FAM - was the fear that the FAM might be recognised by the British Government as the only

32 Pollak's article in The Tribune, 17 October 1941, quoted in Maimann, op.cit., p.121
34 Ibid., p.117
coherent Austrian representation and thus eclipse the Socialists from post-war Austrian political life. However, all attempts by the various Austrian groups to be recognised by the British Government during the critical period of planning for post-war Austria came to naught, because even after eighteen months of strenuous political activity the British Government considered them 'totally unrepresentative' of opinion in Austria and unlikely, even if they managed to achieve unity among themselves, ever to become so. Eden's explanation for his government's attitude was that the overwhelming proportion of Austrian emigres were Jewish and that those elements most active in Britain - the Communists and Monarchists - had had little support in pre-Anschluss Austria. The Christiansocials, on the other hand, despite their pre-Anschluss popularity in Austria, were hardly represented in Britain, whereas the Socialists were not prepared to set themselves up as a government-in-exile even if the British Government were to give encouragement to such notions. At any rate, Eden contended, there was no 'outstanding' Austrian personality in exile around whom the emigres could rally.

**Planning Austria's future**

Austrian activities - beginning with the FAM's first mass rally in London and address to Churchill on 24 January 1942 - nevertheless helped to keep the Austrian question well to the fore and on 18 February 1942 Churchill once again stressed his sympathy with Austria:

> We can never forget ... that Austria was the first victim of Nazi aggression. ... The people of Britain will never desert the cause of the freeing of Austria from the Prussian yoke. ... in the victory of the Allies, Free Austria shall find her honoured place.

Anxious enquiries flowed in immediately from two sides. The Government's Political Warfare Executive (PWE) wanted to know whether the Prime Minister's remarks constituted a considered statement of policy, in which case PWE wanted to use it in their broadcasts to

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36 Eden to HM Representatives Abroad, 31 December 1943, FO 371/34467, Cl4084
37 R.R.James, *op.cit.*, p.6593
Austria, and the US State Department sent round one of their advisers to ask whether Churchill's speech meant that the British Government had found a solution to the question of post-war Austria, that 'hideously complicated problem'.

The question of post-war Austria had been considered in the Foreign Office since 1941, but no decision concerning her fate had as yet been reached. Emphatic efforts by the Austrian emigre groups to have Austria formally recognised as enemy-occupied territory made it imperative to study the problem anew. The Foreign Office were concerned that Churchill's pronouncements would make it look as if the British Government were 'edging perilously near to being pledged, morally at least, to a free and independent Austria', a solution which had not yet been examined on its merits.

At a hastily convened Foreign Office meeting, the future of Austria was discussed. Four possibilities presented themselves:

- a free and independent Austria
- Austria as part of a non-Nazi German Reich
- Austria as part of a South German Confederation
- Austria as part of a Central European Confederation.

There was also the fundamental question whether Austria should be allowed to decide her own future or whether she should be 'compelled to choose what was considered best for her and for us'. It was thought that Stalin was hardly likely to allow Austria to remain part of Germany, and memories of the problems of inter-war Austria evoked fears for the stability of a European settlement which Britain would have to underwrite. While there was no knowing whether the Poles or Czechs would welcome the Austrians, or what would happen in Hungary after the war, consensus at the Foreign Office favoured the idea of Austria as a member of a Central European Confederation.

Churchill himself had no doubts on the matter, as he confided to Roosevelt two years later: 'As you know, the idea of Vienna becoming the capital of a large Danubian federation has

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38 Minute by Geoffrey Harrison, 19 February 1942, FO 371/30942, C2390
39 Minute by Harrison, 27 February 1942, FO 371/30942, C2401
40 Minute by Harrison, 19 February 1942, FO 371/30942, C2390
41 Minute by Harrison, 19 February 1942, FO 371/30942, C2390
42 Ibid.
always been attractive to me...

It was agreed, however, that no decision should be made until the economic viability of an independent Austria had been considered and the attitude of the United States Government ascertained.

This was easier said than done. The State Department would not commit themselves at this stage and merely asked that no further public statements concerning Austria be made. Churchill testily observed:

I do not propose to subject myself to any special inhibitions about Austria. I certainly look forward to its liberation and thereafter to its re-establishment, either as a separate state or as the centre of a mid-European confederation.

The difficulty for Anglo-American co-operation in this matter lay in Roosevelt's reluctance to engage in post-war planning at all. The American experience with the 1919 peace settlement and the spectacle of European politics during the 1920s and 1930s had precipitated a retreat into isolationism and left the US Government ill-prepared for the sort of systematic consultation and planning engaged in by the British. Although at least some members of the State Department recognised the need to consider the shape of post-Hitler Europe, Roosevelt was uncomfortable with these activities and preferred to concentrate on short-term military objectives. In the event, it was the US Secretary of State who broke ranks by stating at a press conference that the US Government had 'never taken the position that Austria was legally absorbed into the German Reich'. Amid barely restrained enquiries as to the meaning of this unilateral 'unrecognising' of the Anschluss, the State Department assured the British that Hull's statement did not mean that Washington had conferred enemy-occupied-territory status on Austria; in fact, 'they were as far from making up their minds about this as were HMG'.

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44 Minute by Harrison, 21 February 1942, FO 371/30942, C2400
45 Churchill to Eden, 10 June 1942, PREM 4/33/7
47 Ibid., p. 107
48 R. I. Campbell to Foreign Office, 29 July 1942, FO 371/30942, C7487
49 Campbell to William Strang, 8 August 1942, FO 371/30943, C8007
Behind British and American indecision on this issue lay their equivocal attitude towards Austrians and the Anschluss. The US Government, for domestic public consumption, preferred to foster the notion that it had never accepted the Anschluss. This claim caused considerable pique in the Foreign Office. HMG had at least protested, something the Americans had failed to do. But this was seen as typical of the Americans: 'The US Government ... usually contrive to persuade the public that they are in fact doing much better than we are!'\(^{50}\) The fact was that both Britain and the United States, despite considerable later embarrassment, namely accepted the assault on Austria as a fact and categorised Austrian refugees as enemy aliens throughout the war.\(^{51}\)

The dilemma involved in reaching a decision on Austria's fate was that Austria was of crucial importance both to the prosecution of the war and for post-war security in Europe. The defeat of Nazi Germany demanded the encouragement of Austrian resistance by the promise of post-war independence, the only issue on which it was thought that Austrians could be united.\(^{52}\) Yet, an independent Austria, if politically unstable and economically fragile, might well once again become a danger to European peace by tempting other nations to intervene in her affairs. But the problem was even more complicated than that. First, although FAM propaganda in Britain made fantastic claims about Austrian anti-Nazi resistance and desire for Allied invasion - 'Let your bombs fall, Comrades, and defeat your and our enemy!'\(^{53}\) - there was little direct evidence of this and London thought the majority of Austrians too apathetic to make any sacrifices.\(^{54}\) Secondly, publication of HMG's support for an independent Austria would be used by Nazi propagandists as proof of Allied intentions to destroy and dismember Germany, thus discouraging potential German resistance to the Nazi regime. Not least of all, there were the sensitivities of the succession states to be

\(^{50}\) Minute by Frank Roberts, 10 August 1942, FO 371/30942, C7487

\(^{51}\) For an analysis of British and American attitudes towards Austrian emigres see R.Keyserlingk, *op.cit.*, Chapter 3

\(^{52}\) OSS paper 'Great Britain and the Austrian Problem', 25 June 1942, FO 371/30943, C8007

\(^{53}\) quoted in Maimann, *op.cit.*, p.129

\(^{54}\) Minute by Denis Allen, 13 January 1943, FO 371/34464, C321
considered. They might not appreciate any undue sign of 'tenderness' towards the Austrians.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, London was gradually edging towards a decision. There were indications that some of the objections to a formal repudiation of the Anschluss, and the political commitment this entailed, were not as formidable as once thought. The effect on German resistance could at any rate be discounted. Robert Vansittart's savage indictment of the Germans for their conspicuous 'will to wars' had lost none of its force since he first published his assessment in 1941.⁵⁶ In 1943 he could only repeat his contention that reliance on the so-called good Germans was a waste of time; he had spent a lifetime 'looking for them with a microscope' and had yet to find one.⁵⁷ New ground had also been broken by a study of the economic viability of an independent Austria. Whereas the views of various government departments ranged from doubtful to a 'categoric affirmative' on the question of such viability, the Foreign Office took this as a good sign because it did at least not preclude the possibility of an independent Austria on economic grounds. Politically, an independent Austria appeared increasingly 'the easiest solution'.⁵⁸ The issue of Austrian resistance, on the other hand, remained a problem. Although in early March a considerable jump in executions of Austrians seemed to indicate an increase in Austrian resistance,⁵⁹ by May the Foreign Office had to admit that reports by the military indicated that Austrians in the German forces were still 'fighting like tigers', even if they did surrender with 'considerably more alacrity' than the Germans once they thought the position hopeless.⁶⁰ Not until some time after the end of the war would a British politician acknowledge publicly that for many Austrians fighting in Hitler's army had not been a matter of choice.⁶¹

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⁵⁶ R. Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present* (London, 1941)
⁵⁷ House of Lords Debate on Post-war Attitude towards Germany, 10 March 1943, *Keesing's*, 27 March - 3 April 1943, p. 5692
⁵⁸ Minute by Harrison, 3 October 1942, FO 371/30943, C9554
⁵⁹ Marginal note by Harrison, 6 March 1943, FO 371/34464, C2790
⁶⁰ Minute by Harrison, 1 May 1943, FO 371/34464, C4907
⁶¹ Speech by Ernest Bevin, 26 May 1948, AdR, BMAA, K64
The lack of a declared policy regarding the future of Austria was proving more and more a handicap in the fight to separate the Austrians from the Germans. By May, however, the Foreign Office had cleared their minds on the subject and drawn up a paper, entitled 'The Future of Austria', which Eden circulated to Cabinet on 27 May. The paper stressed the strategic importance of Austria. Any great Power in control of Vienna and the Austrian Danube would be economic master of Danubia. Austria could be used by an aggressive Germany against Danubia, or she could be the only line of defence against Germany. As an extension of Switzerland, Austria could separate Italy from Germany and thus cut the line of the Axis. Austria was truly the 'keystone of the European arch'. Given this unique position, the peace and security of Central and south-eastern Europe depended on the re-creation of an independent Austrian state. To encourage Austrian resistance to future domination by Germany, she must from the very beginning:

be given preferential treatment as compared with Germany. Austria will only survive if the United Nations are prepared not only to eschew penalising her for her past misdeeds but actively to afford her sustained support and encouragement both in the political and economic field. Failure on the part of the United Nations to shoulder this responsibility will almost inevitably result in the end in the return of Austria to the German fold.

The feeling was that the security of an independent Austria would no doubt be enhanced by her association with some Central or south-east European confederation, yet it was difficult to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of such a course and there was no guarantee even that any such confederation would emerge after the war. Despite this reservation, the Cabinet feared that the promise of an independent Austria would not have much appeal and agreed that HMG should definitely aim at a 'Central European or Danubian group centred on Vienna' and that care should be taken to establish this group before opinion hardened on other lines. Subject to these qualifications, the Cabinet adopted Eden's memorandum for

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62 Memorandum by Eden, 25 May 1943, CAB 66/37, WP(43)218
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
purposes of political warfare and preliminary discussions of post-war matters.\textsuperscript{65} 

The Foreign Office immediately drafted a declaration concerning Austria and sent it and the paper 'The Future of Austria' to Moscow and Washington for comments by the Soviet and American governments. The draft declaration did not contain the 'confederation' proposal, though, because Molotov had in the meantime warned that he would have no part in such a scheme.\textsuperscript{66} This attitude was later reinforced by an article in 	extit{Izvestia}, which claimed that:

the artificial attachment of small countries to theoretically planned groupings would be fraught with dangers both for these countries themselves and for the future peaceful development of Europe.

Furthermore, the article stated, the Soviet Union 'resolutely rejects all attempts at reviving the 	extit{Cordon Sanitaire} policy against the USSR, no matter under what shape they are camouflaged'.\textsuperscript{67}

Moscow's opposition was not the only problem for the War Cabinet. Both South Africa and Australia had doubts about the wisdom of a commitment to an independent Austria, to which Churchill, after a 'confused' exchange of telegrams between the Dominions Office and the respective governments, curtly replied that 'surely they should be told that everything done during the war will be for military purposes and must be reviewed after the victory is won'. HMG could not have their foreign policy strangled by the Dominions: 'Living as we do within twenty miles of Europe, bearing as we are nine-tenth of the British Commonwealth and Empire war burden, we must be accorded reasonable latitude'.\textsuperscript{68} The Dominions' objections to Austrian independence being thus dismissed as irrelevant to the prosecution of the war, and in the face of Soviet hostility to the confederation concept, the re-establishment of a free and independent Austria was published as agreed policy by the governments of the United States, Great Britain and the USSR in their 'Declaration on Austria' on 1 November 1943.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[65] 16 June 1943, CAB 65/34, WM(43)86
\item[66] Eden to Clark Kerr, 14 August 1943, FO 371/34465, C7012
\item[67] \textit{Izvestia}, 18 November 1943, quoted in \textit{Keesing's}, 27 November - 4 December 1943, pp.6129f.
\item[68] Prime Minister to Dominions Secretary and Foreign Secretary, 12 August 1943, FO 371/34465, C9001
\end{footnotes}
British assessment of Austrian attitude

Having under the combined pressure of political warfare considerations and Soviet demands arrived at the promise of independence for Austria, the British wondered what effect the Moscow Declaration had had on the Austrians in Austria. Although London obstinately refused to accept Austrian emigre agitation for an independent Austria as indicative of 'real' opinion within Austria, and reports from inside the country were scarce and hard to come by, there were certain indications that German-Austrian relations were deteriorating rapidly. In Berlin the publication of the Moscow Declaration had had 'the effect of a bombshell' and had intensified German measures to counteract the emergence of Austrian separatist tendencies. Information received during the first few months of 1944, however, presented the British with a picture which in no way convinced them that the Austrians were able or even keen to fight their way out of the union with Germany.

In a long and rather confused report, the British Government's Political Warfare Executive portrayed the Austrian situation as follows. There was no doubt that even after six years of formal dissolution and absorption by the German Reich Austria was still a distinct country and determined to stay so. Although Austrians 'talk a lot and do nothing about it', there was much more evidence of underground political activity than in Germany, and the German authorities were sufficiently concerned about it to conduct an 'exaggerated reign of terror' against the Austrians. On the other hand, the future of Austria looked unpromising because the Austrian political emigration, distinguished by faction and destructive feuds, was seen as a probable reflection of the political situation in Austria, with the peasants and middle classes hankering after the return of a clerical regime or even a Habsburg restoration, and the industrial workers fighting for union with a democratic Germany. Then again, the argument advanced by a young Austrian, that Austria ought to be 'independent like Switzerland', was cited as a supreme example of the political 'childishness' of the mass of Austrians,

69 Foreign Office Research Department, Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries, (henceforth referred to as FORD WPIS), 10 November, 1943
making their opinion on the question of Austria's future 'worthless'.

The Germans, meanwhile, continued to neutralise the Austrians' discontent by sending them to concentration camps, increasing the number of executions, systematically infiltrating their towns with special S.A. contingents and bombed-out Germans, and establishing in Austria's eastern-most province special military organisations trained to deal with disturbances and revolutionary movements. The German regime thus showed a much more realistic appreciation of Austrian opposition than the Foreign Office, which had an obsession with the Austrian lack of fighting spirit and railed against the unreasonable attitude of simply wanting to survive. Dismissing reports of organised resistance as a mere product of Communist propaganda, Oliver Harvey, Superintending Under-Secretary at the Central (later German) Department, summarised the attitude of the Foreign Office:

Were it not for the strategic importance of keeping Austria separate from Germany, we could let this flabby country stew. It is clear that Austria is doing next to nothing for herself and we shall have the greatest difficulty in infusing life into her after the war. There are no political leaders inside or outside the country who command any following. Austria will fall into the first arms which are opened to her.

**Austrian attitude to independence**

The British could not have been more mistaken in their assessment. The Austrians accepted the Moscow Declaration as proof that the Allies had finally understood the true nature of the Anschluss and were now prepared to make amends. To understand the Austrian attitude something needs to be said about the Austrian resistance to Hitler's Germany. The suggestion of an 'Austrian Resistance' had sparked sneers among the British and much heart-searching among the

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70 PWE Report 'Austria: Attitudes to Germans, the War and the Future', 23 April 1944, FO 371/38835, C5554

71 Press Reading Bureau/Stockholm to FO, 14 January 1944, FO 371/38835, C849; Balfour to FO, 16 January 1944, FO 371/38835, C768; Press Reading Bureau/Stockholm to FO, 24 February 1944, FO 371/38835, C2709; Minute by Roberts, 22 March 1944, FO 371/38835, C3922; FORD WPIS 10 November 1943, 1-29 March 1944

72 Minute by Oliver Harvey, 3 July 1944, FO 371/38839, C8260
Austrians right into the 1980s. Ernst Hanisch, in an article which asks whether there was such a thing as a specifically Austrian resistance, eventually answers with a clear yes. He does, however, explain why the existence of an Austrian resistance — by now well documented — has been such a controversial subject. The controversy stems from the ambiguous role Austria played after 1933. As recently as February/March 1988 (the 50th anniversary of the Anschluss) the issue of what the Austrians call Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with one's past) has managed to divide Austria's Socialists and Conservatives to a point where some Viennese think it not absurd to talk in terms of another civil war. The essence of Austria’s problem with her past lies in the fact that, as a nation, Austria was both victim of Nazi aggression and perpetrator. There are memories of Austrian anti-semitism more virulent than any dreamt of in the German Reich, pictures of jubilant masses welcoming German troops into Vienna, and a suspicion that Hitler’s virulence was, after all, the product of provincial Austrian society. Nothing illustrates the latter point better than an anecdote told in pre-Anschluss Austria, when an Austrian Heimwehr man gleefully tells a German Nazi that Hitler was unleashed by Austria on Germany in revenge for 1866.But most of all there remains the conviction that the authoritarian fascist governments of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg deprived Austria of the most substantial opposition to National Socialism by their suppression of Social Democracy.

Yet Austria had quite obviously been overrun by National Socialism against her will. In 1945, in an effort to cement this picture of victimisation by Hitler's Germany, leading Austrians of various political persuasions would use their imprisonment in concentration camps as legitimation for their claim to be fit leaders of the newly liberated state. The shared experience of persecution by the Nazis provided a bond, however tenuous, between those who had initially suffered the brunt of Nazi aggression — the Austrofascist

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73 E. Hanisch, 'Gab es einen spezifisch oesterreichischen Widerstand?', Zeitgeschichte, Vol.12, 1985
74 See for instance R. Luza, The Resistance in Austria, 1938-1945 (Minneapolis, 1984)
75 This sentiment, aggravated by the controversy surrounding President Waldheim's war-time activities, emerged during several conversations I had with young Socialists in Vienna.
76 J. Kunz, Hoffnungslos, aber nicht ernst (Vienna, 1976) p.55
elite of government, bureaucracy, police and Heimwehr — and those who were the victims of that very elite long before Hitler annexed Austria, the Socialists and Communists. Thus, when the Moscow Declaration demanded Austrian resistance to Hitler as part of the price of freedom, the Austrians angrily declared that they had resisted, in one form or another, since 1934. As the Austrian Delegation to the treaty talks of 1947 would point out, Austrians were labouring under special handicaps in their efforts to resist the Nazi occupation. They were discouraged by the British from forming a government-in-exile. They were infiltrated by Gestapo agents whose language was indistinguishable from their own, making communication among resistance groups doubly hazardous. Austrian workers, their willingness to work for the German war effort rightly suspect, were closely supervised and spied upon by the so-called factory police, rendering sabotage a deadly enterprise. Austrian political and labour leaders hostile to National Socialism were arrested and imprisoned, and the opposition of young Austrians was destroyed by forcing them into German military service and subjecting them to 'incessant military drill'.

Nevertheless, several exclusively Austrian resistance groups — of all political persuasions — had indeed been active since at least 1942, and the American OSS knew how to make good use of them, even though they had to admit in 1945 that neither the Russians nor the Western allies had given any material aid to the Austrian underground.

What irked the British after 1945 and made the Austrians wish the whole issue would disappear was that during the war the overwhelming resistance effort was made by the Austrian Communists, a large number of whom were ex-Socialdemocrats radicalized by the events of 1934. But, whether antagonistic towards the Nazis or simply passive, most Austrians had long before the Moscow Declaration grown heartily sick of the effects of being part of the Third Reich. Between the enforced Prussianization of the Vienna Civil Service, the Nazi persecution of that most integral part of Austrian rural life — the Catholic Church — and the hardships brought about by

77 Memorandum by the Austrian Government, 6 February 1947, AdR, BMAA, OeB London, K5
Hitler's warfare, the Austrians became ever more conscious of the gulf dividing them from the Germans. When the Allies proclaimed their intention of liberating Austria from the German yoke, it seemed like the answer to all their prayers. In 1943, neither Britain nor America, preoccupied with the war, foresaw how seriously the Austrians would take their war-time propaganda of an 'independent Austria' and with what determination they would insist on governing their own country.

Indeed, while London sniffed at Austria's 'flabbiness', many of Austria's political leaders, those the Foreign Office in their moral indignation failed to detect, were making their own plans for post-war Austria. But they were essentially pragmatists. Austria had been abandoned easily by the British Government in 1938, her representatives in Britain were persistently ignored, and not until November 1943, more than five years after the Anschluss, had the Allies declared in favour of Austrian independence. Nevertheless, long before the British Cabinet reluctantly accepted the political wisdom of nullifying the Anschluss, the men who between them would command over 90% of the votes cast in Austria's first free elections after the war were mapping out the future of Austria - a future in which union with Germany, or any other state for that matter - played no part.

Who were these men and what was the basis of their undisputed leadership after the war? Three of the leaders of post-war occupied Austria - Karl Renner, Adolf Schärf and Oskar Helmer - were Socialists and as such belonged to that section of the population which had most fervently wished for union with Germany after the first world war. With the advent of Hitler, however, the Socialists had struck union with Germany off their party programme, and the forcible incorporation of Austria into the German Reich had done nothing to endear the Germans to them. Although Renner had shortly after the Anschluss made a declaration welcoming it - something the British would hold against him in 1945 when he formed the first Austrian government - Schärf's biographer dismisses this as nothing more than an old man's dogmatism, possibly also part of the malicious satisfaction felt by many Austrians at the ignominious end of
More importantly, Renner had been one of the founders of the First Republic in 1918 and had been the Republic's first chancellor and later elected President of the National Assembly. When Dollfuss had dissolved the Austrian Parliament in 1933 and not long afterwards precipitated the civil war between his clerico-fascist storm-troopers and the Socialists, Renner, who was then in his mid-sixties, had been forced into retirement. Disheartened by this defeat of Socialdemocracy, Renner remained politically inactive until the Russians marched towards Vienna in 1945 and agreed with his plans for setting up a provisional government.

Schaerf's background was not quite as distinguished, yet his actions after 1938 were of immense practical value to the future of Austria. Schaerf, twenty years younger than Renner, had made his career as parliamentary secretary of the Socialist Party from the early days of the First Republic and had thus worked closely with Renner until 1933. Sent into the political wilderness by the Dollfuss regime, he became a lawyer and used his office to facilitate contacts between many of the underground Party members. Schaerf and Oskar Helmer were the two most important leaders of Socialism in Austria during the war and they used the network built up by Schaerf to save many opponents of the Nazi regime from the Gestapo's long arm. Helmer later became Minister of the Interior in the first elected post-war government and a particular thorn in the Russians' eye for his relentless fight against Communist domination of the security forces. While Renner's age probably saved him from imprisonment by the Nazis, Schaerf was not as lucky. Jailed for several months in 1934 by Dollfuss' fascist government, he was imprisoned again on the day of the Anschluss by the Nazis. Apparently too small a fish to be sent to concentration camp, he was released again and remained free until a few days after the assassination attempt on Hitler in July 1944.

Interestingly enough, none of the Foreign Office weekly intelligence reports shows any awareness of Austrians being implicated in the plot against Hitler. The British might have been less contemptuous of Austrian resistance had their information been less scant.

80 Ibid., pp.156-157
But the significance of the plot lay not so much in any help the Austrians gave to the plotters but in Schaerf's categoric denial of the desirability of retaining the union with Germany. Schaerf, as leader of the Austrian Socialists, had been approached in the early summer of 1943 by a prominent German Socialist to discuss the end of the Hitler regime. The Germans tried to enlist Austrian support for the proposed German revolution in exchange for a promise that the union with Germany would be retained in peace negotiations. But here, during the three-hour-long discussion in which the German-Austrian future was painted in the most enticing colours, Schaerf experienced what he calls a revelation: 'The Anschluss is dead', he told his visitor. The Austrians were prepared to participate in the overthrow of the Hitler regime, but not in the retention of the Anschluss. When Schaerf subsequently informed Renner and other Socialists around Austria of his statement to the Germans, they agreed with him.81 Thus, at the very same time when the British Cabinet insisted that independence would have little appeal for the Austrians and that, therefore, the British Government should work towards Austria's inclusion in a confederation, the Austrian leaders - several months before the Moscow Declaration - had already decided that independence was the only acceptable future for Austria.

In contrast to Renner, Schaerf and Helmer, Leopold Figl - Schaerf's conservative counterpart in the Renner Government and later chancellor of the first elected government - came from the other side of the political divide of 1934. Born into a long-standing dynasty of Lower Austrian peasants, intensely religious and fiercely patriotic, he was a natural politician and soon became a prominent figure in the powerful Peasant League - one of the pillars of the Christiansocials in the 1930s. He organised the Lower Austrian Stormtroopers, an organisation charged with combating National socialism and Socialdemocracy alike. In February 1934 he was part of Dollfuss' forces which fought the Socialists with such melancholy results.82

In this light it seems almost impossible to imagine that Figl and Schaerf could form such an effective team, as chancellor and vice chancellor, after the war. The explanation for this is to be

81 A.Schaerf, Oesterreichs Erneuerung (Vienna, 1955) pp.19-21
82 E.Trost, Figl von Oesterreich (Vienna, 1972) pp.89-92
found in Figl's fate after the Anschluss. Figl, like so many of his Christiansocial contemporaries, was arrested by the Gestapo on 13 March 1938 for having agitated against the Anschluss to the very last minute. In jail he found himself not only among the political elite of the corporate state, but also among Socialists who had been the victims of that elite since 1934. He spent the next five years as a political prisoner in Dachau concentration camp. As his biographer relates, Dachau became Figl's 'political academy'. He was savagely beaten by his jailers and left for weeks on end in solitary, dark confinement for insisting on calling Austria 'Oesterreich' instead of 'Ostmark'. Whenever he was allowed to be with other Austrians, he talked about Austria's future. Building up an understanding of what it would take to ensure co-operation between the Socialists and the Conservatives, both sides agreed that they would not repeat the mistakes of 1934 and endanger Austria's independence again. In May 1943 Figl was released and set about preparing the peasant population for the re-emergence of independent Austria. But Figl, too, was implicated in the conspiracy against Hitler, and in October 1944 he was transported to Mauthausen concentration camp where he was held until April 1945.

Here, then, in the pre-war position of these men and in their shared experiences during the war lay the foundation of their combined leadership of liberated Austria. London, uninformed and dismissive of Austrian emigre opinion, merely saw post-war Austria as a political infant whose education would be tedious and costly but also conducive to being moulded according to British needs. When Renner's provisional government emerged in April 1945 shortly after Vienna's liberation by the Red Army, the British viewed it with undisguised suspicion, refused to recognise it and did their best to sabotage it.

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83 Ibid., pp.112-123