The Compromise of Return
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In the early hours of April 12, 1945, nine terrified Viennese Jews cowered in the cellar of the house at Förstergasse 7 in Vienna’s second district. Until shortly before, all but one of them had lived openly in Nazi Vienna, safeguarded by positions as functionaries of the Ältestenrat. The ninth had been protected by his marriage to an “Aryan” woman. They sat helplessly, enduring the fear not only of their Nazi tormentors but also of Allied bombing raids. Waffen-SS (the armed wing of the SS that eventually developed into military combat units) and Wehrmacht (the regular Nazi army) troops entrenched in the surrounding streets no longer cared whether or not a Jew held protected status, and the nine suddenly found themselves forced to hide in a cold, dank basement, fearing for their lives.¹

As they huddled together underground, they listened to the bedlam above. The Soviet Army had reached the southern and eastern outskirts of Vienna on April 6, 1945, but it took another five days to seize the capital. On the evening of April 11, fires blazed as remnants of recent battles on the grounds of Vienna’s famous park, the Prater, and throughout the city. Looting citizens skirted rubble in the streets as they competed for scarce foodstuffs and plundered the stalls of the city’s prized market, the Naschmarkt,

for the first time in the course of the war. The desperate ate meat from dead cavalry horses lying in the streets.

As evening fell, the narrow Danube Canal became the battlefront, with the Red Army poised on the first-district side and Nazi Panzers and infantry positioned throughout the second and twentieth districts on the opposite bank.² Waffen-SS officers retreating through the streets toward the Danube River still found time to conduct a hunt for hiding Jews when neighbors informed them of the group in the cellar at Förstergasse 7.³ The group, aware they had been betrayed, debated whether to seek new hiding places. Martin Schaier encouraged them all to scatter into neighboring cellars.⁴ The others considered his plan but decided that the women among them and the men in mixed marriages could safely stay put; only Schaier and other “full Jews” should disappear. Schaier fled to the shelter of a neighboring basement, leaving his wife, Genia, with eight others deemed secure. From his hiding place, he heard a shout: “We still have time to get us the Jews!” He listened as the SS officers gathered the five women and four men who had remained in their hiding place, robbed them of valuables, and marched them outside.⁵ Only after kicking them into the street, beating them with rifle butts, and stabbing them with bayonets, did the officers finally shoot them and dump their bodies into a nearby bomb crater.⁶ A few hours later, the Red Army crossed the Danube Canal, reached Förstergasse,

². Ibid.
⁴. Martin Schaier lived in the building at Förstergasse 7 during the war. See List of Austrian Jews Residing in Vienna during the Occupation, November 30, 1945, 3.1.1.3/78804753/ITS Digital Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington, DC.
⁶. The victims were Dr. Nelly Blum (fifty-four), Erna Klüger-Langer (eighty-two), Grete Klüger-Langer (forty-four), Marie Margolin (forty-four), Genia Schaier (forty-eight), Arthur Holzer (fifty-nine), Arthur Klein (fifty-six), Kurt Mezei (twenty-one), and Emil Pfeiffer (sixty-six); as listed on a memorial plaque at Förstergasse 7, 1020 Vienna. The IKG erected the current plaque on April 14, 1960. It replaced one installed there by the KZ-Verband on April 12, 1954. The same nine victims are also listed on the Vienna City Press and Information Service website, but spellings (i.e., Genia Schaier) and ages differ slightly from IKG figures.
and took total control of Vienna. As the Soviets secured the city, Vienna’s remaining Jews reemerged. Schaier and a few others found that their first task upon “return” entailed the retrieval of the nine fresh corpses for proper burial.

When interviewed after the war, Ältestenrat Director Dr. Josef Löwenherz could have provided hundreds of examples of Nazi brutality but chose the story of the Förstergasse massacre to convey the ruthlessness of the Nazis in Vienna. A matter of hours separated the last Jews murdered in the city from the first to reemerge and “return.” Thrust from society but not from the city, some five thousand Jews had managed to survive in the capital under differing circumstances of protection and privilege and began to rebuild their lives in the immediate moments of the Red Army’s victorious conquest.

WHO REMAINED IN VIENNA IN APRIL 1945?

Ältestenrat statistics from December 1944 reveal that 5,799 Nuremberg-defined Jews resided in Vienna, 1,053 of whom practiced Judaism. Nearly all of those alive in the city at that point lived to see the Nazis fall from power. Estimates of the total number of Jews who survived the war in Vienna range from a little more than 5,500 to 5,600. Of them, just some 600 self-identified as Jews, a group that included 150 technical workers with the firm Wittke and Grimm, 35 Ältestenrat clerks and officials, 35 World War I veterans whom the Nazis had somehow overlooked, 60 prisoners in

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7. Weinzierl, Zu wenig Gerechte, 93.
different jails, over 100 foreign Jews never picked up for deportation, and 150–200 Jews who physically hid from their persecutors.\textsuperscript{12} The other nearly 5,000 persons who were targeted by the Nazis but who did not identify as Jews included those who had intermarried with non-Jews, the offspring of such mixed marriages, and the relatives of some Ältestenrat employees. Living in the city under differing degrees of hardship and concealment throughout the war, most of these survivors did not question whether to “return,” as they had never actually left. They reemerged into society in Vienna, the only home they had ever known. From one moment to the next, they found themselves free to move about their partially destroyed and shocked city, immediately engaging in what social and economic life existed or had just begun. Who were these survivors? How had they endured, and what did they face upon regaining their freedom?

\textbf{U-Boote}

\textit{U-Boote}, the smallest subgroup of Jews to survive in Vienna, endured the Nazi regime in hiding or by concealing their identity with forged or falsified documents. Assimilation proved the critical factor for securing a safe refuge or the necessary papers, as close contact and good relationships with non-Jews better ensured their assistance.\textsuperscript{13} Some lived for years in concealment, protected by friends and relatives. Lucia (Kraus) Heilman was twelve years old in 1941, when she and her mother went into hiding in Reinhold Duschka’s metal workshop at Mollardgasse 85a in the sixth district.\textsuperscript{14} Heilman’s father had fled to Tehran when the political situation became dangerous in Vienna, but his attempts to bring his wife and daughter to join him failed. His close friend and fellow Alpinist Duschka assumed their care and saved their lives.\textsuperscript{15} Many others had felt secure in mixed marriages

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Schneider, \textit{Exile and Destruction}, 157.
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or because of mixed heritage for much of the Nazi period, but they too took to hiding in the final chaotic days. Many Jewish U-Boote considered themselves Catholics because of their own conversion or those in earlier generations of their family, but they nonetheless fell victim to Nazi racial definitions of Jews outlined in the 1935 Nuremberg Laws.

Hidden Jews came from all strata of Viennese society, but their rescuers stemmed largely from kleinbürgerlichen (lower-middle-class) backgrounds. Most helped their Jewish beneficiaries out of compassion, receiving no monetary compensation. As in the case of the Heilmans, many had close relationships with those whom they saved, and some U-Boote stayed on with their protectors after the end of the war. Historian Brigitte Ungar-Klein counts more than fifty marriages between survivors and their rescuers and attributes this largely to close pre-Anschluss relations rather than wartime situations.

As many as 800 Jews may have lived to the war’s end in hiding in Vienna, but estimating the number of U-Boote in the city and accurately counting those who survived proves difficult, as scholars rely on inherently flawed sources. Historian Gwyn Moser took these problems into account when she analyzed 619 U-Boote survivors’ files, including questionnaires from the KZ-Verband (an association of concentration camp survivors), files from the Bestände der Zentrallen Registrierstelle für die Opfer des NS-Terrors (Office for the Central Registration of Victims of Nazi Terror), and Opferfürsorge (Victims’ Welfare) applications. Registration

recognized Duschka as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations,” the honor awarded to gentile rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. In addition to Duschka’s morality and sense of goodness, Lucia Heilman also specified that Duschka and her father were Alpinists and stated that the deep commitment among this group to preserve one another’s lives grounded Duschka as he risked his life to rescue his best friend’s wife and child.

17. Ibid., 38.
18. Ibid., 35.
with these organizations took place on a voluntary basis, and some people refused to list their names as survivors or to apply for state-supported assistance. In addition, work on Opferfürsorge did not take place until the 1960s and required embarrassing verifications that deterred application. For these reasons, many U-Boote survivors left no formal record of their experience or died without opportunity to register. Then, too, the definition of U-Boote varied from organization to organization. Consequently, such official documentation provides an incomplete count. In addition, it is thought that for every U-Boote survivor, at least two were caught, arrested, and deported. Thus, the tenuous nature of life in hiding in Nazi Vienna furthered the impossibility of including an accurate estimate of the number of U-Boote among those who were caught and murdered by the Nazis.21

Ältestenrat Officials and Their Families

Both in Germany and in Austria, the Nazis pressed the leaders and employees of the formal Jewish communities into roles laboring to serve any remaining Jews, those of mixed ancestry, and those who were baptized but had a Jewish family heritage, the so-called non-Aryan Christians. Composed of the remaining few employees of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien (Vienna’s formal Jewish community, also referred to as the IKG or the Kultusgemeinde), the Ältestenrat was formed by the Nazis in November 1942, following mass deportations of Viennese Jews in October.22 In Germany, the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (Reich Association of Jews in Germany) had a similar function but was officially dissolved in the summer of 1943. It continued to exist de facto to carry out some services to Germany’s remaining Jews who were married to non-Jewish partners.23 In Vienna, however, the Ältestenrat functioned throughout

21. Ibid., 61. To add to the difficulty with such counts, Gestapo files report the arrests of hidden Jews and their rescuers that do not appear in other places. With the establishment of Israel and Yad Vashem’s “Righteous Among the Nations” honors, more U-Boote survivors were discovered as they came forward to honor their rescuers.


the war. Its employees and some of their family members lived in Nazi Vienna under special protected status. As of January 17, 1943, 248 paid employees and 70 volunteers of the Jewish community remained in Vienna, 221 of whom were subject to persecution as “full Jews” by Nazi law. The Nazis permitted each of these to protect one person, and in this way another 170 relatives were saved.24 A few employees of the Jewish hospital and the Jewish nursing home also enjoyed such relative security and safety.25 Franzi Danneberg-Löw served throughout the war as a social worker with the IKG and the Ältestenrat,26 and her status enabled her to protect her mother. Danneberg-Löw’s employment and marriage to a non-Jew gave her the extraordinary possibility of moving back and forth to and from labor camps in Hungary, where she helped provide food and clothing to prisoners, as well as information to family members in the camps and in Vienna.27

The formation of the Ältestenrat was in part a Nazi strategy for eliminating Vienna’s Jewish population without frightening or harming the Volksgenossen, a National Socialist term referring to the community of “Aryan” German citizens.28 The Nazis recognized that caring for the remaining Jewish population actually served the whole population, as non-Jewish Austrians claimed Nazi-defined Jews as family members. Thus, a Jewish cemetery hosted burials, and a Jewish hospital served patients. Jews warranted medical care, even if only to save the non-Jewish population from disease, and therefore required separate Jewish medical facilities.

Mixed Marriages

Marriage to “Aryan” spouses afforded many Viennese Jews protected status for the duration of the war. As they helplessly watched the deportation of relatives and friends, they endured a terrified and insecure existence,

26. Mitarbeiter des Ältestenrates der Juden in der Seitenstettengasse 2–4, July 24, 1945, 3.11.3/78804912/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
27. Franzi Danneberg-Löw, interview, 515, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna, Austria. Danneberg-Löw’s father died of natural causes in 1938.
recognizing the ever-present threat of the revocation of their shielded position. In addition to potential Nazi whims of policy, the death of or divorce from a non-Jewish spouse could mean deportation. During the war, some of these Jews enjoyed a level of tolerance in their social surroundings, but many suffered discrimination and outright persecution. Their non-Jewish spouses also experienced penalties, including the loss of civil-service positions, the inability to secure certain kinds of government-regulated loans, and the requirement to pay additional taxes. Teachers and students harassed schoolchildren from mixed families, while the regime obstructed custody disputes and pressured “Aryan” partners to divorce their Jewish spouses.  

Most Jews in mixed marriages kept a low profile and used discretion when moving about in public. A law passed on September 1, 1941 stipulated that, as of September 15, all Jews residing in the German Reich must wear a so-called Judenstern (Jewish star) in public. Bertha Koppe did not leave her family’s second-district apartment for more than two years during the Nazi regime. Although her marriage to an “Aryan” protected her existence, to venture into the streets with the yellow Star of David invited the possibility of harassment, humiliation, and even arrest. Gender did indeed prove an important component to survival for Jews in mixed marriages. Under Nazi law and administration, intermarried Jewish men were in greater danger than were intermarried Jewish women. In male-dominated Nazi society, gentile men had more influence than women did with Nazi officials and thus were of more protection to their Jewish spouses. Nazi policy toward intermarriage was “neither race-neutral nor gender-neutral,” as historian Matthew Stibbe has noted. Rather, “it favoured the ‘Aryan’ over the

30. Polizeiverordnung über die Kennzeichnung der Juden, in Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt, part 1, zweites Halbjahr 1941, September 1, 1941, 547.
31. Dr. Fritz Koppe (son of Bertha Koppe), conversation with author, Vienna, Austria, November 22, 2011.
33. Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987), 379.
Jew, the wife over the husband and the mother over the childless woman.”  

In the case of Bertha Koppe, her son, Fritz, also believed that his non-Jewish father had held additional leverage as a Berliner who spoke with a German accent.  

Most intermarried couples, as well as many of mixed ancestry, were left to fend for themselves in Nazi Vienna. The IKG and its successor institution, the Ältestenrat, proved of little assistance, as they either shunned the Jewish spouses in mixed marriages as nonreligious or were unable to stretch their sparse resources to include nonmembers. Despite the challenges facing intermarried couples, 85–87 percent of Vienna’s intermarried Jews survived the Holocaust.  

“Mischlinge”  

Many children resulting from marriages between Jews and non-Jews managed to outlast the war in Vienna. They owed their survival to the fact that the racial specifications and qualifications of the Reichsbürgergesetz (Reich’s Citizenship Law, one of the Nuremberg Laws) and the Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre (Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor) did not deem them voll Juden, or “full Jews.” Both laws were passed on September 15, 1935, and went into effect on November 14, 1935, and were used to officially define “Jews” as a legal basis for their persecution and exclusion from society. Those who received the designation of “full Jew” counted three or four Jewish grandparents in their lineage and as a result lost all rights of citizenship in the German Reich. As “partial Jews,” so-called “Mischlinge,” who had only one or two Jewish grandparents, retained citizenship, and the Nazis permitted them to stay in the city, although the threat of future deportation loomed constantly.

35. Dr. Fritz Koppe (son of Bertha Koppe), conversation with author, Vienna, Austria, November 22, 2011.  
36. Bukey, Jews and Intermarriage in Nazi Austria, 191.  
37. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei and Robert Ley, Organisationsbuch der NSDAP (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1940), 569–75.
Anticipating a potential backlash to the persecution of “partial Jews,” Nazi leadership sought to minimize alienating the sizable portion of the population with relatives falling into such a categorization by classifying “Mischlinge” in degrees based on the number of Jewish grandparents. A *Mischling ersten Grades* (“Mischling” of the First Degree) descended from two Jewish grandparents, while *Mischling zweiten Grades* (“Mischling” of the Second Degree) traced their lineage back to only one.\(^{38}\) As long as a “Mischling” was not a member of the IKG, he or she might have the possibility to remain alive in Nazi Vienna. If one held membership in the Jewish community, however, the Nazis termed one a *Geltungsjude* (meaning that he or she counted as a “full Jew”) and doomed one to suffer the full brunt of Nazi racial policy. Other “Mischlinge” deemed *Geltungsjuden* included those who were married to full Jews, children born from mixed marriages that took place after September 17, 1935, and the illegitimate children resulting from “Aryans’” forbidden extramarital relations with Jews after July 31, 1936.\(^{39}\)

Fritz Koppe, the son of the intermarried Bertha and Max Koppe, received the most protected qualification of *Mischling ersten Grades*. Nevertheless, despite good marks in school, Nazi law prohibited him from attending *Gymnasium* (academically oriented high school), and his father arranged an apprenticeship to train with a pharmacist.\(^ {40}\) Although Fritz was able to move about the city, he and his parents nonetheless decided that he should not leave the house except for his training, lest he encounter trouble or violence in the streets.\(^ {41}\)

“Mischlinge” of both degrees served in the Wehrmacht and in the Reich Labor Service. However, the Nazis did not permit them to hold positions of authority in either organization, to become public officials, or to own an entailed farm estate.\(^ {42}\) Thus, with the ability to retain German citizenship and a differentiation between “full Jews,” “half Jews,” and even “quarter

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38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 573.
40. Dr. Fritz Koppe, interview with Barbara Kintaert, April 11, 2012, private collection, Vienna, Austria.
41. Dr. Fritz Koppe, conversation with author, Vienna, Austria, November 15, 2011.
42. Bukey, *Jews and Intermarriage in Nazi Austria*, 15.
Jews,” some so-called Mischlinge lived precariously in Nazi Vienna, so long as they observed all regulations and policies governing their acceptance in society and as long as their “Aryan” parent remained alive.

SURVIVORS RESURFACE

The final days of World War II proved some of the most dangerous and terrifying for Jews in Vienna. The end of the war brought chaos, uncertainty, and increased antisemitic hostility. In addition to harassment, violence, and risk of arrest by the Nazi authorities, bloody fighting between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht and SS raged in the streets, and Allied bombers threatened the city’s residents from above. Vienna’s Jews, from their positions of cover, experienced their city’s partial destruction and finally emerged to welcome the arrival of Soviet troops and the end of the war.

The Final Moments

Jewish and non-Jewish residents of Vienna took cover in air-raid shelters and basements around the city in the final moments of the war, seeking protection from battles between Nazi and Soviet troops, as well as from Allied bombs. In some cases, antisemitism placed Jews in additional danger. Non-Jewish neighbors denied Trude Berger’s father access to the basement of their apartment building in the second district, just meters from the war front. Berger and her non-Jewish mother, both permitted to take shelter there, sat wracked with fear each time they endured a bombing, thinking of their father and husband fending for himself above.43

Loud explosions shook Viennese residents on the evening of April 12, 1945, as retreating Nazi troops blew up all but one bridge spanning the Danube Canal. The following day, the Red Army took total control of

43. Trude Berger, interview 47865, Visual History Archive (VHA), USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles, CA, accessed at the Strassler Center, Clark University, May 2, 2010. Trude Berger also recalled the massacre on Förstergasse and heard the shots that killed the last nine Jewish victims in Vienna.
Vienna. Hiding in a family friend’s cellar apartment not far from the canal, “Mischling” Ruth Mirecki heard the blasts and remembers the following day’s silence. She cautiously peeked from a window to assess the activity outside and for the first time saw Soviet officers patrolling the streets. She saw no sign of either the SS or Wehrmacht men.44 These early moments of peacetime provided Viennese residents the first glimpse of the occupation forces that would shape so much of their lives for the next decade.

Survivors’ initial reactions were mixed. Those who spoke Slavic languages tried to communicate with their occupiers. Many were surprised by the presence of Jews in Red Army units. Lucia Heilman’s mother was shocked when she questioned a soldier in Polish and he replied in Yiddish. He then explained that he too was amazed; he and his comrades never expected to find Jews left alive in Vienna.45

44. Ruth Merecki, interview 38836, VHA, accessed at USHMM, August 1, 2011.
45. Lucia Heilman, interview 30402, VHA.
Searching for Family

Once the fighting stopped and when all residents, Jews and gentiles, realized that the Soviets had taken over the city, they ventured out to survey the destruction, to find food and water, and to search for surviving friends and family members. Berger and her mother emerged from the basement to discover the second district—and especially their street, Glockengasse—severely damaged. Despite an unexploded bomb that had dropped through the roof into their top-floor apartment, they found Berger’s father there, alive. The family cleaned and settled back into their partially destroyed home, where the roof remained unrepaired for many weeks and rain poured in.46

Once survivors had accounted for immediate family members in their vicinity, they sought to locate relatives in other parts of the city. With no public transportation in working order, residents moved about on foot, confronting massive destruction and the remnants of battlefields. The fifty-three Allied air raids that the city had endured had damaged 28 percent of buildings in the once-grand capital of the Habsburg Empire and killed 8,769 Viennese civilians.47

Berger, hoping to find her maternal grandmother, walked with her mother from the second to the seventh district. They started off across a temporary makeshift bridge erected by the Soviets, which spanned the Danube Canal. In doing so, they traversed the former front lines. In the first few moments of their trek, they passed a corpse and a decapitated head. They walked among dead cavalry horses and took in the appalling devastation that surrounded them. They were relieved to reach the grandmother’s apartment and find her at home. Moreover, neighbors had looted a nearby shop and shared their booty, including copious amounts of wine. Berger and her mother also savored the opportunity to wash for the first time in two weeks.48

46. Berger interview.
47. Walter Kleindel, Die Chronik Österreichs (Dortmund: Chronik Verlag, 1984), 537.
48. Berger interview.
Securing Basic Needs

Jews and gentiles alike emerged from shelter taken in the last moments of war to discover a changed and partially destroyed Vienna. Citizens navigated the rubble to begin the process of starting lives anew, struggling simply to secure basic needs. The city lacked infrastructure, resources, a skilled labor force, and energy sources. Perhaps most immediately significant was the scarcity of food. In spring and summer 1945, the urban population subsisted on a near-starvation diet of 250–800 calories per person. In the first weeks, the Red Army provided dried peas in bulk, which staved off actual starvation.\textsuperscript{49} Survivors often recall those worm-ridden peas and how tired they became of eating them, day after day.

City residents waited in long lines to secure food. This situation presented a quirky benefit for some Jewish survivors, as their identity papers marked with a \textit{J} sometimes helped them to the front of the queue with sympathetic shopkeepers. That which had represented doom only days before suddenly offered potential benefit. This turn of status prompted a former-Nazi neighbor to glibly ask Trude Berger how she too might obtain a “J-Ausweis”; Berger admitted that she had flaunted her sudden privilege by showing her neighbor bread she had gotten in such a way.\textsuperscript{50} This short supply of basic food goods, as well as other necessities, also provided fertile ground for a flourishing black market that both Jews and non-Jews alike utilized.

Not all emerging survivors could reclaim or return to their apartments. For the homeless, securing a place to live became a top priority. Somewhat surprisingly, a number of Jews found new apartments quite easily in the first chaotic weeks of peacetime, well before laws about restitution went into effect. Many homes stood completely furnished but empty, after their Nazi residents fled the approaching Soviet Army just days before. On May 8, 1945, Elizabeth Welt Trahan and her father returned


\textsuperscript{50} Berger interview.
to their former apartment on the Strudlhofgasse and found it occupied.\footnote{In 1946, Elisabeth Welt and her father were registered as living at Strudlhofgasse 12/14 in Vienna’s ninth district. See Liste der in Wien lebenden Glaubensjuden, 1946, 3.1.3.3/78805460/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.} The Nazi tenants who had lived one floor below had left, however, and Trahan and her father assumed residence there. While setting up house, Trahan found the previous inhabitants’ copy of Mein Kampf in a drawer and threw it away immediately. She feared that somehow the Soviet occupiers might find it among their possessions and mistake them for Nazi sympathizers.\footnote{Trahm, \textit{Walking with Ghosts}, 214.} The Soviets also assigned such recently vacated homes to others. Occupation authorities gave Lucia Heilman and her mother a former Nazi’s apartment. Heilman recalled that, at first, she simply sat and looked around her. She had forgotten how an apartment looked after more than four years of hiding in a metal workshop. “There was a table and a chair and an armoire. It was an apartment, with curtains. It was amazing to me!”\footnote{Heilman interview.}

By August 1945, however, the provisional Austrian government had taken responsibility for the assignment of property, and problems and uncertainties arose. The central office created to handle such claims annulled the decisions the local council had reached under Soviet supervision and declared them “not yet legal,” thus protecting those who had exploited the benefits of Nazi “Aryanization” policies. Thus, Jews who had regained their former businesses feared losing them again.\footnote{“Confusion in Austria Makes It Difficult for Jews to Regain Their Former Dwellings,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 30, 1945.} Jews and gentiles alike sought assistance with housing arrangements at the municipal Wohnungsamt (housing office). As officials matched the homeless with vacant apartments, they too provided Jews with the unoccupied homes of Nazis who had fled, but always with the stipulation that they agree to relinquish the property to the “rightful” owners, should they return. Historian and Jewish survivor Jonny Moser recalled that his family agreed to this condition, and without a second thought. They simply needed a place to live. The Mosers were lucky;
the previous occupants never returned, and the family could remain in their new home.\textsuperscript{55}

Arrangements for furnishings presented a problem for many survivors, and the municipality tasked an office with providing those in need with basic home goods, if only temporarily. The city of Vienna gave Gertrude Putschin’s family a Nazi’s abandoned furniture “on loan” and with the same requirement that they give it back in the event of his or her return. In Putschin’s case, that person did come back and claimed the furniture. “I don’t know exactly how he got it back,” she said, “but in any case, we had to return it.”\textsuperscript{56} Many survivors speak of the obligation imposed on them by city authorities to return Nazi property they used after the war. The irony of the situation escaped no one; much of this “loaned” furniture had originally been stolen from Jews after the Anschluss.

\textbf{Beginning to Reestablish Lives}

Reemerging survivors confronted the challenge of habituating to the activities and tasks of daily life that were foreign to them under Nazi oppression. Suddenly they were to interact with the same people they had avoided or from whom they had hidden. Those coming out of concealment relearned the use of regular speaking voices after years of whispering. Children encountered others their own age, some for the first time. Trude Berger felt a deep sense of freedom after seven years of secrecy and distrust. Berger and her father reveled in speaking their minds without the need to guard their words, with no worry as to who might overhear, although Berger’s mother scolded them for doing so.\textsuperscript{57} Berger’s mother remained cautious, conditioned by her experiences and with fear and distrust for the gentiles.


\textsuperscript{57} Berger interview.
among whom they lived and who so shortly before had participated in their persecution.

Above all, survivors confronted the insecurities and skepticism they had developed toward their neighbors over the course of the Nazi regime. After Lucia Heilman and her mother left their hiding place in Mr. Duschka’s workshop, the older woman trusted no one and asserted her belief that “99 percent of all Austrians [were] Nazis.” Lucia claimed not to have encountered much antisemitism after the war but added, “at least none to my face.” Survivors knew that, blatant or not, Austrian antisemitism had existed for centuries, paving the way for their neighbors’ enthusiastic and thorough participation in the Nazi expropriation of Jews’ property, followed by their expulsion and mass murder. Surely, this did not disappear from one day to the next. This awareness coupled with caution after the violence and murder of the previous years guided Viennese Jews’ careful maneuvering to return to life in their hometown.

REBUILDING IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTWAR OCCUPATION

The first phase of Vienna’s occupation began upon the Soviet conquest of the city in April 1945. Surviving Jews reemerged into a partially destroyed city that lacked most basic supplies. The Red Army worked to reconstruct an infrastructure and to provide for residents, but soldiers’ feelings of anger and revenge after a traumatic, brutal, and costly war sometimes took the form of aggression and violence.

As everyone in Vienna awaited the arrival of the Western Allies and the assumption of their occupation duties, Austrian politicians filled leadership roles to shape a new government and at the same time set in motion the formation of a postwar Austrian identity as the Nazis’ first victim, a myth that would endure for decades. Founded in the wording of the Allies’ 1943 Moscow Declaration and augmented and sustained by all four occupation

58. Heilman interview.
powers’ eventual endorsement and acceptance, this “victim myth” guided Austrian foreign and domestic policy. 59 Throughout the tumult of post-war reconstruction and international public knowledge of the extent and ruthlessness of the Nazi genocidal campaign, Austria saw little reduction in antisemitism among its citizens or leaders. On the contrary, new ways of discrimination and persecution emerged with the new role of Austria and Austrians as “victim.”

Soviet Occupiers

The first Red Army troops arrived after advancing from the east through Hungary, along the way witnessing Wehrmacht and SS crimes firsthand. Compounded with the knowledge of atrocity and mass murder that the Germans and their allies committed against these soldiers’ families and communities at home, the Soviets found civility and compassion difficult in their roles as occupation troops and frequently turned to revenge.

Many Austrian women suffered rape by Red Army soldiers, and even more recall the persistent fear of such assault. Although no confirmed statistics exist regarding the number and rate of occurrence of sexual assault, 60 it is estimated that as many as 270,000 rapes were reported under the Soviet occupation in Austria, 240,000 of them in Vienna and Lower Austria, 10,000 in the province of Styria, and 20,000 in Burgenland. Many women suffered not one but between two and four rapes, and many of the rapists were repeat offenders. 61 Soviet soldiers’ knowledge of Nazi policy and practice inflicted on their families, communities, and compatriots fueled their anger and desire for revenge, and Austrian women often became their targets.

The Red Army pillaged Austrian industry and equipment systematically, as it did in its occupation zones in Germany. The Allies had decided on the issue of reparations at the July 1945 Potsdam Conference, where they determined that the Soviets would seize German industrial machinery and equipment from their occupation zones, as well as 15 percent of what the Western Allies’ confiscated and another 10 percent of all such industrial equipment. The Western Allies were to take reparations from German assets abroad and from gold reserves in Germany. Historian Vladislav M. Zubok writes that Germany and Austria ended up constituting “a giant shopping mall,” where the Soviets did not pay for a thing. Some 100,000 railcars reached the Soviet Union in the first few months of the occupation packed full of “construction materials” and “household goods,” including some 60,000 pianos, 459,000 radios, 188,000 carpets, almost a million “pieces of furniture,” 3.3 million pairs of shoes, and 1.2 million coats.

At the same time, during the first few months of the Soviets’ solo occupation of Austria, they worked to reestablish municipal services, to restore gas and electricity, and to feed the population suffering from food shortages. Such efforts sometimes seemed to be at the expense of the occupation troops, and soldiers raised complaints that civilians received better rations. In Burgenland, the easternmost province of Austria and located in the Soviet occupation zone, for example, Red Army soldiers received six hundred calories per day less than the civilians at the beginning of 1946. With necessities scarce, a black market flourished, and Soviet officers and soldiers took part along with Austrians.

Seeking to assemble a governmental structure and support for Soviet interests, Stalin’s generals and representatives in Vienna acted on the head start gained by being the first to arrive in the capital. Days after their conquest of Vienna and before the official end of the war in Europe, they set in motion the assembly of Austrian leadership most favorable for the Soviet

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64. Enigl and Zöchling, “Die ungeliebten Befreier,” 35.
Union. This group of Austrian politicians went on to organize a provisional
government that laid the footings of postwar Austrian identity formation
with regard to both foreign and domestic policy.

The Renner Government
Austrian politicians of the postwar provisional government worked dili-
gently to sidestep culpability for Nazi war crimes by immediately placing
total blame on the Germans. They ultimately took advantage of evolving
Cold War politics to pit Western powers against the Soviets for financial
gain and to secure all four Allies’ acceptance of the narrative of Austria as
the Nazis’ first victim. Ignoring both the voluntary and thoroughly non-
vviolent nature of the union of Austria with Germany and the frenzied, joy-
ful welcome that Nazi troops received upon entering the country, Dr. Karl
Renner and his government rewrote the Anschluss as an aggressive military
invasion and occupation of a foreign power. They maintained that from
1938 to 1945 Austria had ceased to exist and therefore was not responsible
for Nazi crimes. Further, the German occupiers had forced Austria into an
unwanted war. With this logic, Austria as a country and all Austrians as
individuals were victims. The “victim myth” became official Austrian for-
eign policy, putting in place a decades-long discourse that also involved anti-
semitism, as in this narrative all Austrians were victims and no subgroup
was to be singled out as special or different. With this argument, politicians
also made great efforts to avoid providing aid to surviving Jews, particularly
those living abroad.

Within days of taking Vienna in April 1945, the Soviets unilaterally
appointed Renner as interim chancellor of Austria and tasked him with
assembling a provisional government. Renner had been the chancellor of
the First Austrian Republic immediately after World War I and the last
president of Parliament before the Austrofascist period. In the final days of
the war, he had initiated contact with the Soviet Army to negotiate protec-
tion for Austrian citizens and to offer his assistance in establishing a post-
war government.65 British and US leaders were infuriated by their exclusion

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65. Kleindel, Die Chronik Österreichs, 539.
from this decision, and the Western Allies’ official recognition of the Renner government came slowly, as they perceived Austria as a potential Soviet puppet, in the fashion of Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland.

Renner’s first official statement on April 27, 1945, proclaimed Austrian independence and autonomy and declared the Anschluss null and void. The pronouncement listed the ways Nazi Germany had victimized Austria, including an “occupation” forced on the “helpless” Austrian people, the degradation of Vienna to a provincial city, and the economic and cultural plunder of Austria’s priceless art objects and natural resources. The provisional government stated in no uncertain terms that Germany had forced Austria into a war that “no Austrian ever wanted,” although Renner himself had loudly supported Anschluss with Germany until 1938. His concerns about the nation’s pain, suffering, and damages never included the loss of nearly two hundred thousand Austrian Jews to forced emigration and murder.

Exploiting the Allies’ wording of the 1943 Moscow Declaration, the provisional government assigned blame and responsibility to the Germans as invaders and occupiers, characterizing the end of the Nazi regime in Austria as “liberation” by Austrian resistance fighters and the Red Army.

An August 1945 memo from the chancellery about foreign policy and international legal aspects regarding the claims of Jewish victims held Germany solely responsible for Nazi crimes. It rationalized that Austria had not existed as a state from 1938 to 1945 and that the “occupied Ostmark” (as the

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Third Reich province composed of Austrian territory was known) had been powerless to prevent German actions. Therefore, the newly reconstituted Austria was not accountable for Nazi offenses and not responsible for fulfilling Jews’ claims for restitution.\footnote{71. Robert Knight, “Ich bin dafür, die Sache in die Länge zu ziehen”: Wortprotokolle der österreichischen Bundesregierung von 1945–52 über die Entschädigung der Juden (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1988), 105.}

The Renner government did pass an Opferfürsorgegesetz (Victims’ Welfare Act) in July 1945 for “victims of fascism,” which included assistance to those who were persecuted on political grounds and for resistance fighters. It made no provision, however, for those who were oppressed on the basis of race, religion, and nationality.\footnote{72. Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 672.} This de facto exclusion of the vast majority of Austrian Jews from qualifying for welfare benefits represents a particularly shameful episode in Austrian history. The nation and its citizens profited immensely from the vast wealth commandeered from Austrian Jews under the Nazi regime. After the war, impoverished, physically abused, and mentally traumatized Jews constituted the most vulnerable and devastated victim group. As part of the postwar quest to cast the nation as the innocent victim of the Germans, however, Austrian law delineated victim groups in a way that comprised most all citizens except Jews but included returning Wehrmacht soldiers, lesser implicated Nazis, and bystanders.\footnote{73. Günter Bischof, “Founding Myths and Compartmentalized Past: New Literature on the Construction, Hibernation, and Deconstruction of World War II Memory in Postwar Austria,” in Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity, ed. Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka, Contemporary Austrian Studies 5 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1997), 307.} Governmental victim benefits provided housing, clothing, and food to concentration camp survivors who had been persecuted on political grounds; those who had been mistreated “on racial grounds only” were specifically excluded.\footnote{74. Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschicchte, 672.} The nongovernmental KZ-Verband (concentration camp survivor association) established in 1945 also refused membership to Jews, as well as to Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and those who had been punished for helping slave laborers.\footnote{75. Embacher, Neubeginn ohne Illusionen, 196–98.} Jewish survivors could turn only to the devastated IKG and foreign Jewish organizations conducting relief work in the city.
The KZ-Verband finally did take on a representative from the IKG and made Opferausweise (victim identification papers) available to Jewish victims in 1946. But surviving Jews in Austria were denied the status provided by the government to their non-Jewish compatriots and received neither significant monetary support nor tax relief until 1949. The government fleeced them of what should have been their entitlement as Austrian citizens during the desperate postwar years. For the second time within a decade, the Austrian government robbed the Jews.

Even after victim welfare laws began to accommodate Jews in 1949, specifically complicated language excluded the majority of prewar Austrian Jewry because of a requirement that one hold Austrian citizenship at the time of application for benefits. The Nazi regime had stripped Jews of their nationality before their expulsion or deportation, and to apply to regain it, the postwar Austrian government required that one reside permanently in Austria. Thus, the law rendered ineligible for victims’ benefits the more than one hundred thousand Austrian Jews who were living abroad after fleeing the Nazi regime, together with any camp survivors who had declined to return, and they only obtained the possibility of recovery of citizenship much later, in 1952. Legislators also clearly conveyed that any monies provided to Jewish victims were intended to support and assist them as Austrians, as it did for other Austrian “victims,” and did not constitute a form of Wiedergutmachung (compensation).

As the government excluded Jewish Austrians, it at the same time accommodated needy “Austrian war victims,” including political persecutees, resistance fighters, and ultimately, veterans of the Wehrmacht. By denying Austrian Jews their rightful citizenship, the postwar government validated the underlying sentiment that their prewar standing as unofficial second-class citizens had been strengthened by seven years of Nazi ideology. Rather than an attitude shift accompanying what seemed a radical change in leadership and the end of persecution and genocide, Nazi racial thought remained embedded in the Austrian national mind-set and in official policy, although the Nuremberg Laws were formally annulled early in

76. Bailer et al., Erzählte Geschichte, 672.
77. Ibid., 673.
the Second Republic. In the Renner government’s fervent effort to portray Austria internationally as distinctly not German and to evade blame for misdeeds in which the nation and its citizens actively took part, it revealed its understanding of the massive crimes committed. By erasing details, it defined both the distinctly German Nazi crimes and Austria’s innocence. The government positioned itself solidly with the Allied endorsement of its “first victim” status and began a decades-long shirking of responsibility and financial obligation to its former citizens, while also framing the development of postwar Austrian national identity.

Western Occupation Powers in Vienna

The Allies officially delineated the four occupation zones of Austria on July 4, 1945, and at the same time established the Allied Council to govern the occupation regime. However, the Soviets worked alone in Vienna until the end of July 1945, when US advance teams arrived to commence preparations for the Allied Council and to set the groundwork for quadripartite control. Upon the urging of US General Mark W. Clark, the other Western powers joined the United States in Vienna in early fall 1945, and the first Allied Council meeting took place on September 12, 1945. By early 1946, the Allies had approximately 260,000 troops in Austria, a number that included 150,000 Soviet, 55,000 British, 40,000 US, and 15,000 French soldiers.

Even before the end of the war, seeds of coming Cold War tensions had spurred the British and Americans to worry about the spread of communism. Their planning for postwar Austria included the intention of handling the country to weaken both German and Soviet domination in eastern Europe. The British, the French, and the Americans set their sights on securing a neutral, autonomous Austria that would work toward the containment of Soviet expansion.

The Western powers finally recognized the Renner government on October 20, 1945, and the start of the official four-power occupation helped launch it into a position of ruling the entire country. The Allies ultimately endorsed the “first victim” version of Austrian World War II history. All four accepted the fabrication, placing a higher priority on the political and economic integration of Austria in the context of increasing Cold War politics. The Western Allies’ embrace of this view of Austria under the Nazis entailed dropping interest in denazification, demilitarization, and disarmament, all to quell the perceived threat of Austrian Communist leaders and a potential Soviet takeover. At the same time, the Soviets felt wary of Austria becoming an “American colony,” and they too supported Austrian neutrality. Cunning Austrian politicians exploited the Western Allies’ fears of Soviet expansion to gain further investment, ultimately finding form in the funds of the US Marshall Plan, which also served to ease the economic burden created by the Red Army’s exploitation of its occupation zone for de facto war reparations. Austria secured its desired postwar identity as victim of the Nazis and in doing so dodged moral and financial responsibility for the many Austrian hands in Nazi crimes.

The First Austrian Elections
Throughout the initial power struggles, antisemitism in government remained constant. In October 1945, Aaron Ehrlich, the president of the Jewish Merchants’ Association of Vienna, publicly cited the antisemitic speeches of Leopold Kunschak, prominent member of the Austrian People’s Party and then deputy mayor of Vienna, and complained that Nazis still held governmental positions and that their anti-Jewish sentiments influenced the granting of licenses, the reinstatement of citizenship, and the allocation of housing. Gaining no support from the Austrian government,

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Ehrlich specified that the Jewish community waited and hoped for the Allied occupation officials’ intervention.\textsuperscript{84}

The first federal elections (November 25, 1945) ushered in a coalition government of the conservative People’s Party and the Socialist Party, which lasted for more than twenty years.\textsuperscript{85} Chancellor Leopold Figl continued Renner’s foreign and domestic policies, including selling Austria as the Nazis “first victim” to the international community to reestablish Austrian national identity as particularly anti-German.\textsuperscript{86}

Election results proved disappointing for the Jewish community. Jewish leaders expressed dismay that not one Jew gained elected office, although the provisional Renner government had included three.\textsuperscript{87} To make matters worse, well-known antisemites including Kunschak and Julius Raab in newly attained official positions reflected the preferences of the electorate. Kunschak had spent seven years in a Nazi concentration camp, convicted as a Catholic anti-Nazi, which lent him antifascist credibility. But he was also well known as a Catholic populist and militant antisemite from 1918, if not earlier. A speech he gave on April 16, 1946, offered examples of his views: “The Polish Jews should not come to Austria; we Austrians don’t need the others either! . . . Austrian industry should not fall into Jewish hands.”\textsuperscript{88} Raab had been the leader of the Lower Austrian Heimwehr and was an active leader in the Austrofascist regime. Despite his political activity and although he held the position of minister of commerce under Schuschnigg at the time of the Anschluss (he was appointed just four weeks before), he

\textsuperscript{84} “Anti-semitism in Austria Is Now as Strong as Under the Nazis, Jewish Leader Charges,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 3, 1945.

\textsuperscript{85} The present-day Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (the SPÖ, or Austrian Social Democratic Party) was founded on January 1, 1889, as the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs (SDAPÖ, or Austrian Social Democratic Workers’ Party). It retained the name through the end of World War II, when members adopted the title Sozialistische Partei Österreichs (the SPÖ, or Austrian Socialist Party). In 1991, it assumed the current title, Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs. “Geschichte der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie,” Rot Bewegt (the website of the history of the SPÖ), accessed June 25, 2013, http://www.rotbewegt.at.

\textsuperscript{86} Bischof, “Between East and West,” 127.


was able to escape Nazi persecution with the help of the Lower Austrian Nazi gauleiter Hugo Jury. Raab was well known as an antisemite; among other public evidence, he referred to Social Democrat Otto Bauer as “ein Saujud” (dirty Jew). Chancellor Figl’s response in defense of Raab’s and Kunschak’s appointments was telling. He explained, for example, that Kunschak “is not antisemitic on racial grounds, but economic grounds.” The Allied Control Commission actually vetoed Raab’s appointment but permitted him to remain a member of Parliament; he later became Austrian chancellor (1953–61). Kunschak, however, retained his position.

The IKG feared that the results would deter the repatriation of Austrian Jews who were still abroad and that those in Austria would become more determined to emigrate. The Austrian Communist Party had also expected to earn a greater representation in the government but gained only 5 percent of the votes. After years of Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda, the anticommunist sentiment that existed before the Anschluss, and the more recent experience with the Soviet occupiers, Austrian voters felt no warmth for or interest in voting for Communist Party candidates.

RESTORING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

In a September 1983 interview in Gemeinde, the Viennese Jewish community’s monthly magazine, the IKG president at the time, Iwan Hacker, reflected on the immediate postwar months. No one believed in a future for the Kultusgemeinde at the time, he stated. On the contrary, he explained, most Viennese Jews thought that any formal Jewish institution in the capital

would simply serve as a cemetery office.\textsuperscript{93} Indeed, Jewish leaders, who nonetheless planned to stay in Vienna themselves, considered their community temporary (\textit{Liquidationsgemeinde}) and believed that sooner or later it would cease to exist.\textsuperscript{94} The numbers were undeniably bleak. The Jewish community, once more than 185,000 official members strong, counted fewer than 5,000 by the end of 1945. The Nazis had forced the emigration of some 130,000 Austrian Jews and murdered 65,459.\textsuperscript{95}

Reconstituting the IKG

As returning émigrés and camp survivors slowly started to join Vienna’s remaining Jews, the reviving IKG encountered numerous obstacles in restoring its community and institutions. Allied bombs had damaged the IKG headquarters on the Seitenstettengasse and destroyed most of its official records. After the Soviet occupation, the IKG gathered the surviving property and papers and moved them by horse and cart to the community-owned building at Schottenring 25, where it reestablished a central office.\textsuperscript{96} The Nazi-appointed Ältestenrat continued its leadership of the IKG in the immediate postwar days,\textsuperscript{97} but ultimately many wartime officials were relieved of their duties. In June 1945, the provisional government’s representative responsible for matters that included Jewish affairs named Professor Heinrich Schur as interim director of the IKG.\textsuperscript{98} Schur had survived the war in the capital protected by his non-Jewish wife and had headed the department of internal medicine at the Jewish hospital on the Malzgasse. For no apparent reason, Schur resigned shortly thereafter.

\textsuperscript{93} Embacher, \textit{Neubeginn ohne Illusionen}, 21.
\textsuperscript{94} Susanne Cohen-Weisz, \textit{Jewish Life in Austria and Germany since 1945: Identity and Communal Reconstruction} (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 88.
\textsuperscript{97} Bericht des Präsidiums der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien über die Tätigkeit in den Jahren 1945 bis 1948 (Vienna: Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, 1948), 3.
\textsuperscript{98} Adunka, \textit{Die Vierte Gemeinde}, 20.
The provisional government designated David Brill the acting director of the IKG on September 24, 1945, and the leadership and atmosphere finally began to stabilize.\(^99\)

By the end of summer 1945, returning survivors of concentration camps made up a significant portion of the IKG’s constituency. Pulling together a professional staff from this physically and psychologically traumatized pool proved challenging, and determining the best ways to serve this impoverished, malnourished, and emotionally distraught group represented the community’s greatest problem. The needs of their members were previously unimaginable and unprecedented.

\(^{99}\) Bericht des Präsidiums, 3–5.
CHAPTER 2

Meeting the Needs of a Traumatized Community

Before 1938, looking after the community’s religious affairs and a few associated charitable activities had occupied the IKG leaders and staff. After the Holocaust, the priorities and tasks shifted dramatically. In 1945, no Jewish cultural or communal life remained, and the IKG had not yet resumed offering religious education. Youth-group efforts, such as the reestablishment of the Jewish community’s athletic association in Vienna, Hakoah, represented the only Zionist life in the city.100 As survivor and postwar resident of Vienna Leon Zelman has written, “[The IKG was] confronted with tasks we can’t imagine today . . . just to make basic life possible.”101

Over the course of the first postwar year, the IKG created new departments to meet the particular needs of returnees. In May 1945, the IKG’s newly founded Fürsorgeabteilung (Welfare Department) reported that it had already provided financial support, clothing, and furniture to 450 Jews returning from concentration camps or emerging from hiding in Vienna. The IKG regained its 120-bed hospital on Malzgasse and assumed care for the 150 residents in its nursing home, as it did for the 20 children living in the Kinderheim at the community’s recovered pediatric hospital. A lending library, an emergency soup kitchen, and a variety of workshops providing for the Kultusgemeinde’s needs began or resumed work to support the community.102

A December 21, 1945, article in the New York–based German-language Jewish refugee (and anti-Nazi) publication Aufbau depicted the US High Commissioner for Austria General Clark and the forces under his command as particularly helpful to Vienna’s Jews and their negotiations with the Allies to recoup property and institutions in their different zones of occupation. According to the report, by the last week of 1945, the IKG had regained and was running a hospital with 81 patients at Malzgasse 16; a nursing home with a special section for concentration camp returnees with

102. Adunka, Die Vierte Gemeinde, 18.
109 residents (82 in the home’s hospital section) at Malzgasse 7; a home for concentration camp survivors with 30 residents at Tempelgasse 3; a home for concentration camp survivors with 52 residents at Unteren Augartenstraße 35; a home for concentration camp survivors with 306 residents at Seegasse 9; a former Jewish community bathing facility at Flossgasse 14 (to be converted for new use after repairing bomb damage); a lending library with 115 registered members at Seitenstettengasse 4, as well as a clothing-distribution and shoe-repair workshop at the same address; and the community’s ceremonial halls at gates 1 and 4 at the Zentralfriedhof, Vienna’s main cemetery (both had been destroyed by the Nazis during the November Pogrom and were unusable at the time of the IKG’s recovery in 1945).

In addition to the dramatically altered needs of the community, the postwar IKG also attracted new segments of the population to its membership. Many of those who took active roles in rebuilding the IKG had had marginal to no contact with a Jewish identity or with the Jewish community before 1938. In addition, many were politically affiliated with the Austrian Communist and Socialist Parties, and Communists dominated community leadership from 1945 to 1948.

Support of Foreign Organizations

The postwar IKG depended on the financial support of foreign (primarily American) Jewish organizations. In particular, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint or JDC) played a crucial role in providing for survivors’ urgent needs. Helga Embacher posited that the rebuilding of the IKG depended entirely on American Jewish organizations. In the IKG’s 1945–48 report of activities, the leadership specifically thanked the American Jewish community and American Jewish organizations for their assistance.

104. Embacher, Neubeginn ohne Illusionen, 21.
105. Ibid., 28.
106. Bericht des Präsidiums der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien, 8.
The IKG and the Joint took the firm position of utilizing their limited resources to support Jewish community members only. The pre-Anschluss IKG, like other religious communities in Austria, had received monies from the state collected through a government-regulated tax on official members. These funds supported IKG services and institutions in the city, and contributors to the system were entitled to its benefits. Those who had left the formal community for whatever reason—most did so in order to marry non-Jews—had officially relinquished their membership and were no longer considered part of the community and thus held no claim to its support or services.

Before March 1938, the logic of this policy went unquestioned. The post-war IKG, however, encountered challenges when surviving “Mischlinge” and spouses in mixed marriages sought assistance as Jews. Persecuted on the basis of Nazi race laws for more than seven years, many felt entitled to assistance, although they had not been members of the IKG nor did they seek to be.107 Others sought membership for the first time, some of them intent on showing solidarity. IKG members and leadership treated such new affiliates with suspicion, concerned that they officially joined the community to ensure the receipt of material benefits, such as Joint care packages.108 Similar issues occurred in German Jewish communities. Rabbi Nathan Peter Levinson fled Nazi Germany to the United States in 1941 and returned to Germany in 1950 at the urging of Dr. Leo Baeck. According to Levinson’s testimony, many people sought conversion to Judaism in the first postwar years. Among the reasons he lists included protest against the Nazis to identify as victims as well as, on the other end of the spectrum, opportunism—to get care packages.109

The Jewish community held that only those who identified as Jews—that is, members—had the right to assistance from the IKG with its

limited funds. Dr. J. Benson Saks, the Joint’s chief of Austrian operations, outlined the IKG’s and his own organization’s rationale for their policies in a letter to General Clark dated January 8, 1946. “From the point of view of [the] Jewish Community of Vienna,” he explained, “and from that of traditional Judaism throughout the world, a person who has forsaken the faith and whose children are raised in another faith, or in no faith at all, are not viewed as Jews within terms of primary responsibility for their care and maintenance.”

In fact, JDC leadership had anticipated the dilemma of responsibility for and care of unaffiliated or Nazi-identified Jews, even before the end of the war, and stood fast in its endorsement of IKG policy. Both the IKG and the JDC took the position that resources would be distributed based on the persecution suffered by the recipient. For example, they reasoned that “Mischlinge” and spouses in mixed marriages who had survived in Vienna under the Nazis had had access to food rations and other supplies, which justified their place at the bottom of that hierarchy. Joint representatives made it clear that if they possessed the means to help all those in need, they would do so. Given the situation and lack of resources, however, they maintained that only formal community members received benefits.

In Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany, historian Atina Grossmann provides a description of a similar situation in postwar German Jewish communities. “In bizarre counterpoint to Nazi efforts to categorize Jews and ‘Aryans,’ an extraordinary amount of pained energy was now devoted to determining who was Jewish and who was not, whose defection had occurred under sufficient duress to be forgiven, and who was judged underserving of the modest but all-important relief services and packets offered by the Magistrat, the Jewish community, and Jewish aid organizations.” Grossmann also points out that the Joint pressured

111. Embacher, Neubeginn ohne Illusionen, 50.
112. Saks to Clark, January 8, 1946, frame 0947.
the community into making such distinctions and that the community in turn credited the JDC for this uncomfortable restriction.113

Postwar issues of Aufbau illustrate the active interest and role of support taken by American Jewish organizations and individuals. This publication of the German-Jewish Club (later the New World Club) served as the mouthpiece for German-Jewish immigrants in the United States and evolved into a weekly anti-Nazi publication of the German press in exile under the leadership of Manfred George in the 1930s. It also provided readers news and information about the remnants of Europe’s devastated Jewish communities and lists of survivors. Advertisements for organizations offering to ship packages of food and supplies to Jews in Europe filled its pages, and many specified their service to Vienna’s Jews. Aufbau also publicized charity events held to raise money to help recovering Jews in Europe. An article on December 21, 1945, for example, described a benefit held earlier that month in Los Angeles. Organized by former Hakoah athletes to raise money to assist their fellow members and needy Jews in Vienna, the event raised the funds for the shipment of one hundred food parcels.114

The “Denazification” of the IKG

As the IKG reconstructed itself, controversy arose about the continuity of leadership. In 1945, the Allies brought to trial former Ältestenrat leaders, Jewish community employees, and Jewish doctors from the Jewish hospital to answer for their functions during the Nazi regime. The IKG naturally found this task most difficult and awkward. Nazi policies of robbery, forced emigration, and genocide had forced community leaders to cooperate with orders and regulations surrounding the deportation of the Jewish

community. As Embacher points out, they did not have much room to maneuver under their Nazi oppressors. Jewish leaders had held little influence over the transports or the number of deportees the Nazis required, and they did not compile the deportation lists themselves. Nonetheless, the larger Jewish community credited them with more power than they actually had. The Jewish community had observed that some functionaries did have a modicum of leeway to negotiate in favor of special groups, like Jewish veterans, the ill, and IKG employees and their immediate family members. As a result, many community members viewed them as collaborators with the Nazi oppressors.  

In May 1945, the Soviets arrested and imprisoned Dr. Josef Löwenherz, the director of the IKG and Ältestenrat under the Nazis, and conducted a three-month investigation of his activities. Löwenherz had been executive director at the time of the Anschluss, and Adolf Eichmann himself pressed him into continuing his leadership role and consequently into assuming ultimate responsibility and oversight for the heartbreaking work with which Eichmann’s men tasked IKG staff. Löwenherz’s deputy Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, the former rabbi at the Kluckygasse synagogue in Vienna’s twentieth district and a Kultusgemeinde religion teacher, functioned as head of the IKG’s Emigration Department and later, after his deportation, as a Judenrat (Jewish council) leader in Terezín.  

Controversy surrounded the work of the IKG under the Nazis and that of Löwenherz and Murmelstein in particular. They had headed the group responsible first for the successful emigration of more than 130,000 Austrian


116. Rabinovici, Instanzen der Ohnmacht, 158.

117. Carla Cohn, My Nine Lives (Buckinghamshire, UK: Shield Crest, 2010), 63.
Jews and then the deportations that sent more than 65,000 persons to their deaths. After the war, some Jews claimed that they owed Löwenherz and Murmelstein their lives. Others accused the director and his deputy of collaborating with the Nazis and taking part in the genocide of their own people. Toviah Friedman, a Holocaust survivor and postwar Nazi hunter, compiled documents to build a criminal case against Löwenherz as Eichmann’s “Schützling” (protégé).118 In the book Justice in Jerusalem, Israeli legal expert and politician Gideon Hausner claimed that Murmelstein had served as a “submissive [tool] in the German extermination machinery.”119

Both men argued that their actions had actually prevented death and loss. Murmelstein claimed that by giving the Nazis one thousand Jews for deportation, they saved another two thousand.120 In an interview in the 1970s with the renowned filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, Murmelstein also gave examples of ways he felt his work had benefited Jews.121 He stated that he had striven to protect older Jews (over the age of fifty-five), that he personally prevented a death march from Terezín ordered by Hitler, and that he negotiated to end a practice of replacing those who were exempted from transport lists with the names of other Jews.122

Soviet authorities arrested Löwenherz on April 21, 1945.123 An investigation of his wartime activities took place in Prague, but allegations against him were cleared. About one year later, he was called to and appeared before an Ehrengericht (honor court convened by Jewish communities in the...

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120. Embacher, Neubeginn ohne Illusionen, 31.
121. Dr. Benjamin Murmelstein, interview by Claude Lanzmann, videotape recording, 1975, Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection, Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, USHMM. Lanzmann interviewed Murmelstein for his epic documentary Shoah but did not use any of the more than eleven hours of video in the final film. The interview can be accessed in full at the USHMM, while some clips are available on the museum’s website, along with complete German- and English-language transcripts. Lanzmann used these interviews in his 2013 documentary, The Last of the Unjust, which focuses on Murmelstein specifically.
postwar period) organized by Austrian Jewish exile groups in London in 1946. There Löwenherz defended himself and upheld that with the IKG’s emigration program, he had saved many Viennese Jews. He also maintained that Eichmann’s office had compiled the lists for and arranged the deportations of Jews from Vienna. He was again acquitted of all charges.\textsuperscript{124} He and his wife left London immediately after the trial and went to the United States.

Murmelstein was arrested in July 1945 by the Czech government and was detained in Prague for the duration of an eighteen-month investigation. He was accused of collaboration, but the public prosecutor withdrew charges against him from the People’s Court of Litoměřice because of insufficient evidence. He was set free once he officially declined to claim compensation for his detention.\textsuperscript{125} Although both Löwenherz and his deputy were acquitted, neither returned to live in Vienna. Murmelstein took up postwar residence in Rome, and Löwenherz immigrated to the United States. Each remained in his adopted home for the remainder of his life. Löwenherz died in 1960 and Murmelstein in 1989.\textsuperscript{126}

Löwenherz and Murmelstein have always been among the debated characters of this era. The profound complexity of their extraordinary positions as victims forced to serve as functionaries under the Nazis meant that they worked under pressures inconceivable to anyone not in their place or at that time. And, controversial leadership notwithstanding, the efforts of the IKG contributed to the flight of some two-thirds of the Viennese Jewish community through emigration. Passing definitive, measured judgment on them has always proven difficult, to say the least.

Lesser but still powerful figures of the Nazi-era IKG and Ältestenrat also came under scrutiny after 1945. Dr. Emil Tuchman survived in Vienna due to his privileged position as the head of the Jewish community’s health service.\textsuperscript{127} In April 1945, the Soviet authorities detained him

\begin{footnotes}
\item[125] Ibid., 374–75.
\item[127] Mitarbeiter des Ältestenrates der Juden in der Seitenstettengasse 2–4, July 24, 1945, 3.1.1.3/78804912/ITS Digital Archive, USHMM.
\end{footnotes}
briefly, but then on September 11, 1945, the Vienna State Police arrested him for criminal charges brought by former Jewish hospital employees.\textsuperscript{128} He was described as a feared disciplinarian, even a “Jewish Hitler.”\textsuperscript{129} Others claimed that he took advantage of his position to protect friends and relatives, took bribes in return for keeping names off deportation lists, and sent individuals whom he did not like or who were otherwise unpopular to concentration camps.\textsuperscript{130} But he also received praise for life-saving actions. Josef Rubin-Bittmann said he owed Tuchman his life, as the doctor had held him in the hospital when he found no accommodation as a U-Boot. Tuchman also delivered Rubin-Bittmann’s son, an act that endangered the physician’s life. Tuchman prevailed over the accusations, and although he declined the appointment, his wartime contact with the Red Cross and the Joint resulted in his nomination to the head of the Wiener Joint Komitees.\textsuperscript{131}

Tuchmann’s arrest by the Vienna State Police was one of a number of criminal proceedings brought against Jewish functionaries. Such proceedings were based on the June 1945 Austrian War Criminal Law (Kriegsverbrechergesetz), which aimed to punish a range of crimes that included offenses surrounding the November Pogrom in 1938, involvement in the deportation of Vienna’s Jews, violence and murder in concentration camps and “euthanasia” institutions, and profiteering through so-called Aryanization.\textsuperscript{132} That is to say that the Vienna State Police equated the forced cooperation of Jewish functionaries under the Nazis to actual collaboration. Factors including this role taken by the Vienna State Police and many Jews’ view of the wartime Jewish community leadership as collaborators contributed to the fact that no actual “honor court” took place in Vienna.\textsuperscript{133} The state had taken the role of trying Jewish functionaries along with Austrian Nazi criminals.

\textsuperscript{128} Embacher, “Viennese Jewish Functionaries on Trial,” 180.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{130} Ralph Segalman, “Letters to My Grandchildren” (unpublished memoir of a social worker with the JDC in postwar Vienna, Northridge, CA, 2001), 77.
\textsuperscript{131} Embacher, \textit{Neubeginn ohne Illusionen}, 36.
\textsuperscript{132} Embacher, “Viennese Jewish Functionaries on Trial,” 166.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 184.
Jewish leaders who served under Nazi domination would be questioned about their activities for decades to come. The Vienna-based Holocaust survivor and well-known Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, for example, judged any and all of them guilty of collaboration with the Nazis. In 1966, he officially called for the IKG to bar all former *Kapos* (concentration camp prisoners elevated to positions of authority over other prisoners) and *Jüdenrate* (Jewish ghetto leadership) members from Jewish community functions.¹³⁴ Despite other survivors’ supportive arguments on behalf of some former IKG employees and Jewish prisoner functionaries, and the official exoneration of many, several remained haunted and some committed suicide. Dr. Paul Klaar served as an IKG physician at a collection point in Nazi Vienna. He attempted to take his own life three times after the war and finally died after being run over by a tram on the Ringstraße. In *Last Waltz in Vienna: The Rise and Destruction of a Family, 1842–1942*, Klaar’s nephew George Clare insinuated that he believed this too to have been an act of suicide.¹³⁵ Memories and conscience also haunted Wilhelm Reisz, a former Jewish *Ausheber* (a marshal who had assisted in finding Jews for deportation) who hanged himself in his jail cell after receiving a sentence of fifteen years in the Austrian people’s court for his crimes of collaboration.¹³⁶ In describing the position of the leaders of the Viennese Jewish community under the Nazis, Doron Rabinovici has written, “Individuals could resign, report for deportation, or commit suicide.”¹³⁷ And indeed, after the war, depending on the accusations against them and subsequent consequences, many also stepped back from positions, emigrated abroad on their own, or considered the option of ending their own lives.

As Austrian Jews reemerged from different forms of hiding and as concentration camp survivors began to make their ways home, newspapers

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¹³⁷. Ibid., 354.
reported to an international audience that Jews did not actually wish to remain in Austria. A letter written by US Army Lieutenant William Perl and published in *Aufbau* in August 1945 related Perl’s observation that returnees came only to find relatives and that hardly any wanted to stay in Vienna.\(^{138}\) The *New York Times* related a January 1946 poll of Viennese Jews that stated that two-thirds of them wished to emigrate from Europe as soon as possible.\(^{139}\) The *Jüdisches Echo*, an Austrian Jewish cultural and political magazine founded by a Jewish university student association, characterized the immediate postwar Kultusgemeinde as going about its work bureaucratically and claimed it lacked heart.\(^{140}\)

In fact, Austrian Jews who survived the war in Vienna had “returned” to reestablish their lives, and the IKG reconstituted with its first postwar open elections in the context of the foreign and domestic policies of the Austrian government gelling under the eagerly assumed victim myth. Accustomed to navigating varying degrees of hostility and discrimination before the Anschluss, Viennese Jews had skillfully maneuvered pervasive antisemitism, overt and otherwise, as highly assimilated and acculturated members of society. When the Nazis were finally defeated, Jews who returned reemerged into life in a suddenly occupied Austria, first by the Soviets alone and then with the additional three Western Allies a few months later, where the Allied forces helped ensure them a level of acceptance. Once again, they learned which battles to take on and which to ignore as they assessed the realities of compromises they would have to make to live under a government and among a people that had never intended their return.

Many who survived in the capital never faced an actual or even a philosophical decision about their return home. They simply resurfaced into the society from which the Nazis had brutally thrust them years before and went about tending to immediate daily needs, reestablishing their lives in

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the only home they had ever known. They were, after all, Viennese, and they navigated politics and society with Viennese sensibilities to coexist in a precarious situation. “Yes,” Trude Berger said in an interview, “and that was ‘peace,’ and relatively speaking it was naturally not yet peaceful, but it was the end of the war.”}

141. Berger interview.