The Compromise of Return
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Hansi Tausig spent the war years in exile in Great Britain, where she became active in the youth group of the Austrian Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs, or KPÖ), Young Austria. As war’s end drew near, she and her comrades—many of them Jewish, like Hansi—conducted a book drive. Armed with lists of the names and addresses of German and Austrian Jewish refugees, they knocked on doors across the city. In the early years of the Nazi regime, many families had escaped with complete household inventories that included massive collections of books. As the young Austrian Jews greeted their fellow refugees, they asked them to donate titles banned by the Nazis. They explained that they planned to send the books to Vienna to replenish libraries and to reeducate a generation of young people conditioned by years of Nazi propaganda and censorship.

The idealistic young Communists learned that not all refugees shared their hopeful vision of a postwar Austria. Some told them that they would rather burn their books or throw them in the River Thames than give them to Germans or Austrians. The rehabilitation of those who were connected in

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1. For a summary of Young Austria’s activities and biographies of former members, see Sonja Frank, ed., Young Austria: Österreichinnen im Britischen Exil, 1938–1947: Für ein freies, demokratisches und unabhängiges Österreich (Vienna: ÖGB Verlag, 2012). See pages 419–26 for a biography of Hansi’s husband, Otto Tausig (mentioned later in this chapter), which also includes information about and a photograph of Hansi.
any way to the mass murder of their families and friends ranked low among refugee Jews’ priorities. Unlike the politically committed and convinced youths who greeted them at their doors, they foresaw no place for themselves in postwar Germany or Austria and wanted nothing to do with their former neighbors. Still, Hansi and her friends managed to gather hundreds of books, which they shipped to Vienna. For them, the book drive was part of a larger vision of reclaiming their homeland and securing Austria as an autonomous, democratic state. The youth group planned to distribute the materials once their members arrived home to begin the work of correcting the influence of years of Nazi antisemitic and anticommunist ideology.

In spring 1946, Hansi, her husband, Otto, and some other Young Austria members arrived in Vienna eager to begin their work. The Tausigs spent their first night back in their hometown on the floor of the Communist Party’s youth offices, where, to their dismay, they happened upon the books that they had so diligently collected in London. They had been neither circulated nor read. Abandoned and forgotten, the entire collection sat in a moldy, disorganized pile in a storage room. They had sent the books to Vienna more than six months before, but in the face of the more immediate, basic needs of the city’s postwar disaster situation, the distribution of reeducation and cultural material held little importance.

Hansi pinpointed the moment of finding the discarded books as the symbolic start of the disappointment and disillusionment that followed. All they had discussed and planned in great detail for the reeducation of Austrian youth proved unrealistic in the midst of a chaotic and partially destroyed Vienna. The neglected, crumbling pile of ruined books, Hansi said, “was all a lot of rubbish,” and, similarly, many of their idealistic expectations and plans for a significant role in postwar Austria were also relegated to a figurative garbage heap.2

During the war years, the Austrian Communist and Social Democratic Parties operated in the various countries of Austrian refugees’ exile; both had

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To Reclaim Their Austria

A significant presence in London, but other hubs of émigré political activity included Washington, DC, Stockholm, Paris (until 1940), and Moscow. They organized their groups and recruited members, provided activities and events, and otherwise gave refugees in foreign lands an adopted family and home with which to identify. They provided a vision for their members’ return to their political home, as both parties planned for and worked toward a day when they would return to reclaim their Austria.

A firm belief that both country and government had been forcibly taken from the Austrian populace guided the efforts of these party members. From the start, the Austrian Communist Party saw this as a two-part violation. In the view of party members, the Austrofascists first had assumed dictatorial control with the installation of a new constitution in May 1934, which continued until the time of the Anschluss. Based in part on Italian fascism and Catholic national politics, the Austrofascist regime opposed the National Socialist sentiment brewing in Austria and imprisoned Nazi Party members, but it incarcerated Social Democrats and Communists too, deeming them political opponents as well. The Anschluss ushered in a second round of oppression for the latter two groups, as the Nazis too imprisoned their political enemies. Former “illegal” Nazis (illegal under the terms of the Austrofascist regime) became important members of the Nazi Party in Austria, while supporters of Karl von Schuschnigg and the ousted Catholic fascist leaders found themselves in concentration camps alongside the Communists and Social Democrats they had jailed.

The Social Democratic Party (then, the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs, or SDAPÖ) had initially endorsed union with Germany. After the Allies signed the 1943 Moscow Declaration that, among other things, clearly stated the official position that Austria was the first victim of Nazi aggression and implying that the Anschluss was an invasion and occupation by a foreign power, the Social Democrats came to concur with the KPÖ’s opposition. By the end of the war, both groups had

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instructed their members abroad that Austria and their fellow Austrians eagerly awaited and welcomed their return. These directives included the assertion that, once the Allies forced out the Germans, the exiles would be needed to take part in the reclamation and reconstruction of the country. In the meantime, they should work and prepare for that time from their positions abroad.

Bruno Kreisky, an Austrian Jew who survived the war in Sweden, later became the Socialist chancellor of Austria from 1970 to 1983. He wrote that even before the Nazi regime, the Socialist movement had been a “true home” for many people. “It enabled them to feel that their life, even with all its misery, still had human dignity.” In the same way, the Social Democrat and the Communist Parties provided continuity for their members in exile by fashioning such homes and surrogate families abroad. Both parties impressed their vision for postwar Austria on their members, and Kreisky specified that one of his primary political concepts in the immediate postwar years was to found a new Austrian patriotism and to make Austria “into a good homeland for its people.” For him and for other convinced Communists and Social Democrats—many of them Jews—their commitment was as Austrians who had a role in and a responsibility for their nation after the war. Their political activity in exile prepared them to return, reclaim, and reshape their political home.

In *Reclaiming Heimat*, a literary analysis of memoirs written by Jewish Austrian refugees, language and literature scholar Jacqueline Vansant has described returnees’ motivation as a desire to reattach to an Austrian collective, a “we.” She specifies that Socialist and Communist political beliefs provided a concept of the “we” that one could hope to rejoin. Austrian-born writer and Holocaust survivor Jean Améry never returned to live in his homeland, but he also suggested the significance of a connection to a collective identity through his discussion of finding its absence. In his essay

"Wie viel Heimat braucht der Mensch?" (How much home does a person need?), he wrote about the loss he felt of both an individual and a collective identity. "I was no longer an I and did not live within a we." Rather than returning to reclaim a lost home, Améry’s experiences had taught him that his deep bonds to his homeland had been an "existential misunderstanding." As Améry understood it, he and other Austrian Jews forced into exile had to realize that they had not lost their country; rather, they needed to recognize that it had never belonged to them. Each perspective exhibits an aspect of the importance of a concept of home to which one feels a belonging. One elucidates the hunt for something fundamental and meaningful, while the other stresses the failure to find or the outright loss of the same. The Social Democrat and the Communist Parties in exile kindled and stoked their members’ desire for a "we" and drew them to return to Vienna with hopes of home, even after the devastation of their families and communities.

Both parties’ fundamental beliefs rested on the premise that Germany had invaded and occupied Austria against its will, a perspective that was first advanced by Austrian exile groups abroad and that later gained official weight with the Moscow Declaration. A little heard and less acknowledged portion of the Declaration was the further stipulation that Austria carried "responsibility for its participation in the war on Hitler’s side." Many of the large proportion of Jews among both the Social Democrats and the Communists shared the belief in this early iteration of the victim myth. Their acceptance of it paved the way for many to return to and reclaim their political home, an idea fostered—and, for some, created—during their time abroad. Refugees’ identification with these parties also permitted an interpretation of their persecution as a manifestation of political strife rather than as the oppression of a cultural or ethnic group.

9. “Wir aber hatten nicht das Land verloren, sondern mußten erkennen, daß es niemals unser Besitz gewesen war. Für uns war, was mit diesem Land und seinen Menschen zusammenhing, ein Lebensmißverständnis.” Ibid., 86.
Reémigré Jewish Communists and Social Democrats faced antisemitism and clear evidence that they in fact were not wanted, but their political commitment guided them through the difficult postwar years of reconstructing an independent nation. They believed in the home that their parties had provided them during the years of Austrofascist suppression in Austria and throughout their wartime exile abroad, as well as the home promised to await them in Vienna after the war. The surrogate families they had formed abroad solidified the sense of political home and belonging in Vienna. Accepting the idea that Austria had been the Nazis’ first victim, many returned assured that the Germans’ departure also meant the departure of the Nazis and that home awaited them. For Hannah Fischer, a young Viennese Jewish Communist who survived the war in England, going back to her hometown was key. “I was born here, I was brought up here, I went to school here, and though I [experienced] quite some antisemitism . . . I also had friends who were friendly and interested and so on . . . I didn’t feel that the town was at fault. It was just the Nazis.”

Hannah Fischer, interview by author, Vienna, Austria, June 25, 2011.

AUSTRIAN COMMUNISTS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS BEFORE THE ANSCHLUSS

Austrian Communists’ and Social Democrats’ political commitment throughout and after World War II flowed from their parties’ histories, particularly their role in the political past of Austria—and specifically Vienna—after World War I and during the Austrofascist dictatorship of 1933–38. The significant part played by Social Democrats in “Red Vienna,” the disastrous results of the short civil war in 1934, and the Austrofascists’ persecution and arrest of members of both the Austrian Communist and Social Democratic Parties shaped both groups’ commitment to a nation that they viewed as having been usurped by a hostile power. Then, too, Austrofascist political oppression had led many to flee Austria even before
the arrival of the Germans. Communist Prive Friedjung, for example, left Vienna for Moscow in November 1934 and returned in September 1947. Dollfuss banned both the Communist and Nazi Parties and, after the civil war in February 1934, eventually also declared the Social Democratic Party illegal. In July of the same year, Nazi revolutionaries assassinated Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss in an unsuccessful attempted coup, and Schuschnigg succeeded him to stave off National Socialism for another four years.

Czechoslovakia became the center of Austrian Communist and Social Democrat activity in exile. The Social Democrats established a foreign bureau in Brünn, and the KPÖ set up offices in Prague. With the Germans’ invasion of the Sudetenland and subsequent annexation of Bohemia and Moravia, many Austrian Communists continued their journey eastward to seek security in the Soviet Union, where they felt they could live according to their beliefs with like-minded comrades. Others, both Communists and Social Democrats, found safety in Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Belgium, France, and the Scandinavian countries. Communist and Social Democrat Austrian Jews, persecuted for political reasons under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, found refuge in Palestine too. Max Tauber’s father, a member of the Social Democratic Party, was threatened with arrest after he refused to join the Fatherland Front. He fled to Palestine, and his family joined him there. Thus, Max was not in Vienna at the time of the Anschluss, and he and his family survived the Nazis in exile in Palestine.

The Austrian Communist and Social Democrat Parties took different positions on unification with Germany. The Social Democrats favored Anschluss and considered it a viable option for their party’s political and strategic future. After the Germans’ arrival in Austria, however, the Nazis maintained the ban on the Social Democrats and the Communists and added to their list of targets the leaders of the Schuschnigg government.

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14. Ibid.
15. Max Tauber, interview by author, Vienna, Austria, October 22, 2010.
The Nazis deported their political opponents to concentration camps, where former enemies suddenly found themselves imprisoned together. Increased antisemitic measures and rhetoric also accompanied the Nazis’ arrival in Austria, and many Jews, along with Communists and Social Democrats (both Jewish and gentile), fled Austria.

WARTIME IN EXILE

Once the Nazis’ threat and intentions became clear, many Jewish members of both the Social Democrat and Communist Parties fled to nearby countries. Some Austrian Communist volunteers had fought with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War (July 17, 1936–April 1, 1939) and, after Franco’s victory in April 1939, had remained in perceived safety in France rather than return to Nazi Austria. Other Social Democrats and Communists fled from Austria to France. Anni Friedler married a French friend she had met in a Socialist youth camp years before in order to escape. She remained in Paris until the Nazis marched in and then fled south, where she worked with the Communist Party until February 1943. A number of Austrian Social Democrats, such as Bruno Kreisky, who decades after the war would become Austrian chancellor, found safety in Scandinavia. Like Kreisky, some of these refugees later found their paths of remigration via the Soviet Union or by passing through eastern Europe to enter Austria. Some Communists fled east to the Soviet Union, both for security and to join their ideological comrades.

A significant number of Austrian Social Democrats and Communists—among them, politically active Jews—fled to Great Britain, where prewar

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17. Anni Friedler, interview, 173, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna, Austria. Their marriage did not last, but as it seemed to have been a union meant to ensure Anni’s safety, it was nonetheless successful.
18. See Walter Neuhaus, interview, 300, DÖW.
19. See Kurt Hahn, interview, 210, DÖW.
governmental policies provided some opportunity for resettlement. An IKG and Reichsvereinigung der Juden Deutschlands (Reich's Association of Jews in Germany) report on Jewish emigration, as submitted on November 11, 1941, to the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Head Office), stated that 146,816 of the 206,000 20 Austrian Jews estimated as of May 2, 1938, had emigrated to other countries, including 27,293 to Great Britain. 21 Postwar statistics of the Kultusgemeinde and the Jewish Historical Commission for a similar period (March 13, 1938, to mid-November 1941) quoted a slightly higher total of 30,850. 22 Not all of these people began as politically engaged members of the Communist or Social Democratic Parties in exile, but their sheer number created a meaningful pool of disenfranchised and isolated recruits seeking group identification and a feeling of home with other Austrians. In addition to these Jewish refugees, some 3,000 non-Jewish Austrian political exiles resided in Great Britain and took part in maintaining Austrian political activity abroad. Jews thus constituted about 90 percent of all Austrian exiles in Great Britain during World War II. 23

Some Jews had arrived in Great Britain as unaccompanied children on the Kindertransport, while a number of young women had come with special permits to work as domestic help. Others found asylum through their own means or the IKG's unflagging efforts to help them emigrate. We shall follow politically active Austrian Jews who survived the war in exile in Great Britain, paying particular attention to the wartime and postwar experiences of members of the KPÖ in exile and their activities as members of the Austrian Centre and its youth group, Young Austria. A close analysis provides

20. Jonny Moser calculated the estimate of 206,000 Austrian Jews to be about 5,000 too high and came to the total of 201,000. See his calculations and explanation in Moser, Demographie der jüdischen Bevölkerung Österreichs, 1938–1945 (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, 1999), 18–19.


23. Muchitsch, Österreichischer Exil, 8.
insight into their reasons for and expectations about returning to postwar Vienna, which were similar to those of other politically active Austrian Jewish reémigrés. As we shall see, ideology was a key motivation for their decisions to go back to Vienna.

The Austrian Centre and Young Austria

After fleeing Nazi Vienna and arriving in Britain, many Austrians sought to combat isolation and to maintain some tie to their home country by connecting with other refugees in the same situation. Various cultural groups sprouted in Great Britain to provide exiles places to gather and events in which to take part, and to offer a feeling of home. Because British authorities had imposed restrictions on refugees' political activity and organization, some such groups provided a substitute for political activity by continuing engagement through other means. The Austrian Centre was one important Austrian cultural group that also operated unofficially as an organ of the KPÖ. Originally established in early 1939, the Centre opened its doors on March 15, 1939. The founders conceived of and created a community center to serve as a place for Austrians to gather and also aimed to help the economically ailing Austrian Self-Aid charitable organization provide assistance and guidance to Austrian refugees. Like most Austrian refugees in Great Britain, the majority of the Centre's members were Jewish.

By 1941, the Centre maintained a head office and two branches in London, plus one each in Birmingham and Glasgow. Members enjoyed access to club rooms and reading rooms, attended organized lectures, and even dined in an Austrian restaurant. Socials and dances were held, in addition to many other activities including a Jewish study circle, a literary debating club, and a knitting group. The Centre-affiliated Viennese Theatre, The Lantern, provided a venue for the drama group's performances, and the publishing arm of the Austrian Centre, Free Austrian Books, operated out of the...

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26. Ibid., 7.
main London branch. The Centre offered refugees help and advice about war matters and issues surrounding the internment of family members.\textsuperscript{27} It even offered membership to interested English citizens, and, as of January 1, 1943, the Centre counted a total of three thousand dues-paying members.\textsuperscript{28}

Attracted by cultural events, attendees soon recognized that the Austrian Communist Party guided and ran the organization. In addition to social and cultural offerings, the Centre offered opportunities to participate in political discussions and organizing. The youth arm of the Austrian Centre, Young Austria, was founded in 1939 with twenty members and worked closely with its parent organization.\textsuperscript{29} The primary concerns of both were to plan for postwar Austria and to recruit returnees. Young Austria, for example, offered a Jugendführerschule des Jungen Österreich (Young Austria

\textsuperscript{27} Austrian Centre, \textit{This Is Austria} (London: Austrian Centre, 1943), back cover.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{29} Sonja Frank, introduction to \textit{Young Austria: Österreichinnen im Britischen Exil, 1938–1947; Für ein freies, demokratisches und unabhängiges Österreich}, ed. Sonja Frank (Vienna: ÖGB Verlag, 2012), 17.
School for Youth Leaders) to prepare young leaders to deal with practical and ideological matters after their return. These courses lasted three to four months, included exams, and provided diplomas for those who passed.  

At the same time, Austrian Jewish men who were interned as "enemy aliens" in the United Kingdom also found their way to the KPÖ and to Young Austria through the groups' activities in internment camps. With the fall of France in 1940 and the subsequent end of the "phony war," the British government initiated a policy of internment of foreigners who were deemed potential threats to national security. This resulted in the confinement of around twenty-seven thousand so-called enemy aliens, including Jewish refugees along with non-Jewish Germans, Austrians, and Italians. Of these, over seven thousand were deported to Canada and Australia. Most internees were men, but some four thousand women also found themselves temporarily in such camps—most in the Rushen camp on the Isle of Man—until the end of July 1940. Although interned Jews were detained and in some cases humiliated and denigrated by guards, the treatment they experienced paled in comparison to what they knew was taking place in their home countries. Then, too, rather than languish passively, many of the internees took advantage of suddenly imposed spare time to organize cultural and intellectual activities. The many scholars, artists, and other leaders among them organized cabarets, concerts, and art exhibitions; wrote and distributed internal camp newspapers; and developed camp universities and libraries.

Austrian Communists were among the most ambitious and resourceful of such organizers, and in addition to providing activities for internees,

31. The term "phony war" refers to the period between September 1939 and May 1940. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, thus triggering World War II. England and France formally declared war at that time but did little else until May 10, 1940, when the German Army marched into Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.
they also sought to recruit and indoctrinate new members. Many inmates thus came to the Party and remained active after their release, which began to occur in January 1941 and continued throughout 1942. (Only a few “hardcore of people” remained interned to the end of the war.) 34 Max Schneider became a member of the Party during his confinement on the Isle of Man and continued his activity later in similar detention in Canada. Communists seemed to enjoy a great deal of authority in both camps, he recalled. The ideology guided him upon his release and subsequent enlistment in the British Army, in which he fought eagerly “to free Austria from fascist control.” 35

The KPÖ continued its work through the Austrian Centre and its Young Austria youth group and, from its position in exile, pushed on toward its main political goal of a free state. The Party sought the Allies’ official recognition of Austria as an invaded and occupied country in need of liberation, solidifying and formalizing its endorsement and promotion of the “victim myth” as a main principle for postwar recovery and reconstruction. It encouraged its members to do everything possible to support the British war effort and to work toward an Allied victory, including volunteering to fight in the British armed forces. It planned for return to Vienna after war’s end and strove to prepare its members for postwar work, reeducation, and political involvement in Vienna. It did so through a combination of programs and services that fostered the dual purposes of keeping émigrés occupied and active while indoctrinating them with the Communist Party’s ideological and political plan.

Social Democrats in exile in Britain also formed political groups but were less overtly active in their organizing and enjoyed less success. Party leadership had been located in Paris from the start of the war and moved to New York City with the collapse of France in 1940. London-based Social Democrats formed the Austrian Labour Club but remained quite insular, with support only from their approximately one hundred members, and

35. Max Schneider, interview, 287, DÖW.
barely tried to recruit new members among the refugees. 36 Their activities did, however, include providing advice to the British Labour Party about the situation in Austria and making contact with British government offices and politicians, trade unionists, and journalists. 37

But the Social Democrats and the Communists took different positions on their ideas and plans for Austria’s postwar fate. The main issue dividing the two was the Social Democrats’ refusal to support an independent postwar Austria. Until 1943 and the Allies’ Moscow Declaration, the SPÖ still held onto some remnants of its post-1918 position of favoring Austria’s Anschluss with Germany, which left it open to the accusation of endorsing a policy that was not too different from the Nazis. 38 In addition, the Communists based their platform on the concept that their organization served as the mouthpiece in exile of a strong resistance in Austria, the extent of which the Social Democrats doubted, which further distanced the two. 39

The Free Austrian Movement (FAM) and Austria as “First Victim”

The KPÖ was one of the Austrian groups in exile operating in the United Kingdom that officially formed the Free Austrian Movement (FAM) in London on December 3, 1941. 40 Initially the FAM consisted of the Austrian Centre, the Council of Austrians, the Monarchists organized in the Austrian League, the Austrian Democratic Union (a small bourgeois group led by Emil Müller-Sturmheim and Julius Meinl), the Association of Austrian Social Democrats (a breakaway group organized by Heinrich Allina), Marie Köstler’s League of Austrian Communists in Great Britain, and a number of youth, professional, and regional organizations: fifteen member

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39. Ibid., 40.
40. Free Austrian Movement, Case of Austria, 6.
organizations in all. Germany had invaded the Soviet Union in June of that year, and these Austrian organizations, heavily influenced by the Communist Party, joined to create the FAM in response. Members signed a resolution that clearly stated their position: Nazi Germany had annexed Austria by force, and all Austrians desired a free, democratic nation within the 1918 borders. The FAM sought to secure the Allies’ official acknowledgment and acceptance of the concepts that united its members: that Austria had been the first victim of Nazi aggression and that they represented the true, pre-Nazi Austria. The organization wanted the British government to refuse to accept the Anschluss and to assure Austrian citizens the right to self-determination as per the Atlantic Charter, the Allies’ official statement of intended goals for postwar policy, which among its many aims included the intention of restoring self-government to those who had been deprived of it. Further, the FAM sought to mobilize all Austrians in the United Kingdom to work for the Allied cause through service in the military, civil defense, and war production and pointed out that this required a change from their “enemy alien” status.

The 1942 publication *The Case of Austria* outlined the interests of the FAM and stressed what the group claimed to be an inherent Austrian opposition to Nazism. The support of the British government, this slim volume posited, would strengthen Austrian resistance. This booklet portrayed Austrians as a united people opposed from the start to the Nazis’ “foreign, military occupation.” It subjectively and emotionally asserted that Austrian sensibilities and patriotism simply could not have permitted Austrians to allow Anschluss. *The Case of Austria* presented this innate Austrian inability to embrace unification with Nazi Germany as proof that the smaller nation had been forcibly occupied by a foreign military power. The FAM urged the Allies to accept its view and to embrace Austria as one of the Allies.

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42. Free Austrian Movement, *Case of Austria*, 32.
43. Ibid., 30.
44. Ibid., 27.
45. Ibid., 25.
The book went on to point out that combating the Nazi enemy had brought together groups with previously divergent missions, as evinced by FAM membership composed of Catholics, Social Democrats, and Communists. Austrians living in the United Kingdom felt it to be their duty to do all they could to assist their compatriots at home in their struggle for freedom. They wanted to devote their energy and efforts to an Allied victory, including creating a Free Austrian Fighting Unit to fight the Germans.46 In summary, The Case for Austria specified,

The idea of the Free Austrian Movement sprang from the desire of all freedom loving Austrians for the restoration of Austria’s liberty and independence and from the will to fight for freedom, to help to win it, and not simply to accept it as a gift. The idea of the Free Austrian Movement was born out of the realization that the active part played by Austrians in this country could help to bring nearer the hour of liberation in Austria itself. The Free Austrian Movement will, it is hoped, finally clear away all the obstacles which have hitherto prevented and still prevent the full utilization of Austrians in the active struggle at the side of the Allies.47

At the same time, the Austrian Social Democrats in exile in Great Britain organized their members. After some increased activity in 1940, they founded the London Bureau of the Austrian Socialists in Great Britain in April 1941.48 But the bulk of the group’s activity consisted of attacks on Communist successes, like the creation of the FAM, a most important example of Communist strength in coordinating a united front of diverse groups from different backgrounds.49 The London Bureau was the main group of Austrians missing from the FAM, and, determined not to be drawn in, they created the rival Austrian Representative Body (österreichischen Vertretungskörperschaft) after the 1943 Moscow Declaration and asserted their representation of all Austrian exiles. The FAM naturally rejected this

46. Ibid., 29.
47. Ibid., 26.
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claim, and fighting continued.\textsuperscript{50} The Austrian Representative Body in the end served only to cut off Social Democrats from the other groups of Austrians incorporated in the FAM.\textsuperscript{51}

The FAM began organizing for return in 1943 and reported in \textit{Austrian News} that it had assembled a committee of experts to negotiate planning with the Allies for an independent Austria—and presumably a new Austrian government—and to deal with postwar problems.\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Austrian News} emphasized the broad political representation of the FAM and nimbly and diplomatically addressed its hosts in exile and anticipated occupiers by phrasing its plans as provisional and tentative, to be carried out with and by the Austrian population. Another of the FAM’s publications, \textit{Das Free Austrian Movement in Großbritannien und der Wiederaufbau Österreichs} (The Free Austrian Movement in Great Britain and the reconstruction of Austria), described the FAM’s vision for postwar Austria and attempted to engage the Allies in reconstruction. Fashioning its plan after that of the Czech government-in-exile, the FAM aspired to secure the same Allied recognition and acceptance as the Czechs had.\textsuperscript{53} Such official status never came to be, but the wording and ratification of the Moscow Declaration that underscored Austrian victimhood encouraged the FAM and the Austrian Communist Party. With this, the KPÖ’s mission solidified: once the Allies “liberated” their Austria, Communists in exile would return and take part in rebuilding a democratic society.

Preparing Austrian Communists for Return to Their Political Home

Well before the Moscow Declaration, a KPÖ and Austrian Centre top priority was to persuade and prepare members to return to Austria once the war ended. The Centre’s president, Franz Carl West, gave a speech in spring 1942 with a title that both reflected the organization’s intentions and played on the English cultural environment in which the refugees lived. “Zurück

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 38.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Bearman, “Austria Tomorrow?,” 215.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 216.
\end{itemize}
oder nicht zurück—das ist keine Frage” (To return or not to return—There is no question) made the case for going back to rebuild Austria as Communist Party members and specifically as Austrian citizens. West also encouraged all Austrian refugees in Britain to take part in the war effort,\(^54\) as they had the opportunity as residents in their Allied host country to show their support and to contribute to the defeat of Nazi Germany.

KPÖ instructions and expectations competed with the message of Zionist group leaders, who told their members “that the return to Austria would be the way to certain death” and that “for Austria’s youth every path would be better than the one leading back to Austria.” Jews constituted the vast majority of the membership of the Austrian Centre and the Austrian Communist Party operating in wartime Great Britain, but the great majority of Austrian Jewish refugees in the United Kingdom were neither communists nor Communist Party members, and many were loath to return to Austria after Nazi persecution and genocide, not to mention Austria’s long history of antisemitism.\(^55\) Addressing these issues, the general secretary of the Austrian Centre, Willi Scholz, penned a pamphlet that appeared in February 1943, *Ein Weg ins Leben: Das neue Österreich und die Judenfrage* (A way into life: The new Austria and the Jewish question), that countered the Zionist argument and attributed antisemitism to the German nationalist and pan-German movement in Austria.\(^56\) Under a new government, he declared, a newly conceived and reconstructed democratic nation would have starkly different qualities that allowed no place for antisemitism.

A May 1943 survey of two Young Austria groups in London revealed that 70 percent of respondents desired to return to Austria.\(^57\) Young Austria depended on this enthusiasm and commitment and envisioned that its young members would take up the task of undoing years of Nazi ideological programming, especially among former members of the Hitler Jugend.

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\(^{55}\) Bearman, “Austria Tomorrow?,” 214.
\(^{57}\) Bearman, “Austria Tomorrow?,” 215.
Young Austria trained its young leaders and prepared them to organize and lead Communist youth groups after their return home. In this, the Party was successful; its greatest achievement in postwar Vienna was its youth arm.59

The war ended in Europe two years later, on May 8, 1945, and the Allied occupation of Austria began. The time had come for the KPÖ to set its plans into action. Its members would return as Austrians to a land in which they foresaw no place for antisemitism and where they were needed to help undo the effects of Nazi propaganda and indoctrination. The Austrian Centre closed its doors at the beginning of 1947 after organizationally and financially suffering when key members returned to Austria.60

RETURN TO VIENNA

The Austrian Communist Party in exile had informed its members of their duty to help at home and pushed them to return to take part in the nation’s political and physical reconstruction. Many Social Democrats also went home for the same reasons, despite the original wavering and ambiguous positions of their party. This largely Jewish group of returnees viewed themselves as Austrians and specifically as Communist and Social Democratic Austrians. They also viewed their compatriots as victims, with few exceptions. Their parties ultimately had led them to believe, and they expected, that their countrymen and women awaited and welcomed their return. “We wanted to live and work as Austrian Socialists in Austria ... personally, professionally, politically,” wrote Stella Klein-Löw. “We wanted to adapt the life that had been interrupted by exile to the new circumstances, revive old friendships, deepen existing relationships... And we would have also been ashamed to have abandoned Austria, Vienna, Socialism at this juncture to wait for better times.”61

58. Ibid., 221.
59. Ibid., 228.
60. Richard Dove, introduction to Bearman et al., Out of Austria, 2.
Whether a prewar decision or a determination made during the course of political activity abroad, Austrian Centre and Young Austria members consciously chose to return to Vienna as Austrians and committed Communists. They sought to reclaim their homeland and to take part in its political and physical reconstruction and, in doing so, supported the victim myth, or at least some part of it. As Communists, they found that the myth fit their Party’s ideological instruction and guided their way back. As Jews, their acceptance of Austria’s and Austrians’ victimhood permitted them to return to a land and a people with whom they felt they shared the horror of the past and a promise of a future.

**Expectation Encounters Reality**

Actualizing the goal of returning home, however, was more complicated than simple desire. To go to Vienna, returnees needed the official approval of the Allied occupiers, which was not easily granted, particularly in the first days after war’s end. Initially, the Allies banned repatriation, attributing their decision to food shortages in the city and the disruption of transportation. One exception to this prohibition, however, was the entry of the leading member of the Social Democrats’ London Bureau, Oscar Pollak, in September 1945. When the Communist-dominated FAM inquired whether Pollack’s approved return meant that the general ban was lifted, it received a negative reply. Remarks by an official of the British Foreign Office illuminated the Western Allies’ perspective: “It is in our interest to strengthen the Social Democrat and Christian Social elements in Austria against the Communists.”62 The occupying forces saw the value of supporting Social Democrats in their return and the resumption of political activity on behalf of Austria. Cold War politics had begun to brew, and a strong Communist presence in a partially Soviet-occupied Vienna was not attractive to the Western Allies.

The assessments and opinions of other organizations and officials and their impressions of life in Austria bolstered the Allies’ reluctance to grant permission for Communists to return to Vienna, especially as such a large proportion of Austrian refugees in Great Britain were Jewish. Dr. J. Benson Saks, the head of Austrian Operations for the Joint, clearly stated in a February 20, 1946, letter that he felt that Jews should be discouraged from going back to Vienna. He argued that an antisemitic atmosphere in Austria compounded the general postwar social and economic problems and made for a particularly hostile place for Jews. He also recommended that the Joint officially discourage repatriation, although he admitted that he believed that the Austrian government itself was willing and prepared to protect the rights of Jews:

In this regard, however, I state emphatically, and in doing so I am supported by a considerable weight of opinion, that insofar as the Jewish problem is concerned, the Austrian Government does not reflect the sentiments, the attitude or the tenor of the great mass of Austrian people. It cannot be denied that antisemitism is endemic to Austria. Nor can the recent twelve or so years of intensive anti-Jewish indoctrination of the Hitler program be eradicated from the minds of the populace over night, or by efforts of the new Government. The great and predominant mass of Austrians have been and are intensely anti-Semitic. The preponderant majority, if they would reveal to you the true state of their feelings, would state that one of their greatest regrets is the fact that Hitler did not finish the job entirely, and liquidate every single member of the Jewish community.63

At least in the early months of Allied occupation, a Joint representative could be convinced that the newly formed postwar Austrian government sought to protect and advocate for all its citizens—even Jews. Although Saks officially discouraged Austrian Jews’ return, the atmosphere in which

CHAPTER 4

he formed such observations supported hopeful réémigrés’ concept that, despite it all, they were needed in Austria for reconstruction and education. In theory and according to their belief, the government would support them.

Many Communist Party functionaries gave up on legal permission to repatriate and undertook unauthorized journeys back to Vienna. This often involved roundabout routes. Many traveled from London to Paris, where they met Party members who organized their next steps. Other members soon followed along similar routes and continued to do so well into 1946. Hansi Tausig and her husband, Otto, ostensibly attended a trade-union conference in Paris in April 1946. When they arrived, however, officials checked their luggage and found pots, pans, and household items, clear signs that they did not plan simply to stay a few days for meetings. Nonetheless, they were permitted transit through the country, and Party members in Paris helped them arrange their continued journey to Vienna without tickets. A colleague bribed the train conductor, and they enjoyed first-class accommodations all the way home.64

Immediately upon arrival or even on the journey home before reaching Vienna, returnees encountered the reality of postwar Austria and Austrians’ attitudes. Viennese Jewish poet and Austrian Centre leader Eva Kolmer traveled to the capital in early 1946. Along the way, she observed the first indications that the Germans had not been the wholly unwanted occupiers that she and her comrades assumed. As her train passed through the station in Innsbruck, Kolmer witnessed distraught Tyrolean women bidding German soldiers a tearful farewell. “And then,” she stated in an interview, “we saw that there was no dislike of the Germans and [that] there had been no resistance against them.”65

Like so many Jewish political activists, Communist Gerda Geiringer had, in her words, “bought the line that Austria was Hitler’s first victim. And when I returned to Austria in September 1946, I was very quickly disabused…. I didn’t think that we would be greeted at the Westbahnhof with cheers. I didn’t think the Communists would have a big following. I was

64. Tausig interview.
65. Eva Schmidt-Kolmer, interview, 719, DÖW.
one of the most realistic people. But coming to Vienna, I was more than surprised. I mean I was horrified and surprised.”  

For many who went back, the decision to return had been hardly a decision at all. Their Party instructed them to do so; then, too, many had always intended to return. Decades later, Hannah Fischer recalled the day in 1938 when her mother took her to Vienna’s Westbahnhof to depart for England; she had thought with certainty, “I will come back!” She returned to the same but much-destroyed train station in September 1946 with a few other Young Austrian group members. They had traveled via Paris, where they had waited a few days before moving on to Vienna, committed to rebuilding Austria through their work with the Communist Party.

Renewing Lives: Housing, Work, Education

Life in postwar Vienna was difficult for Jews and gentiles alike. With more than 25 percent of the city destroyed, the infrastructure damaged, and massive food shortages, those who went back faced a bleak landscape. Like other Jews who survived the war in the capital or returned from concentration and death camps, they confronted a lack of housing and a need to earn a living. They also encountered antisemitism and exclusion from Austrian civil servants and from their neighbors. Unlike other Jews, however, they had their Party and fellow Party members to rely on.

In 1946, Hansi and Otto Tausig were greeted at the Westbahnhof by a friend and Communist Party member whom they had known in London and who took them to the Young Austria headquarters, where they spent their first night in postwar Vienna. A friend’s mother soon took them in, and they stayed with her for a few days until they happened to meet another old friend at a May Day demonstration. He lived in a large apartment that

68. Hannah Fischer, interview by author, Vienna, Austria, June 25, 2011.
he sought to fill before government officials assigned strangers to the empty rooms, as was the practice of housing administrators in postwar Vienna. He welcomed Hansi and Otto to join him, and thus they secured a home for the next couple of years.\textsuperscript{69}

In many ways, the Tausigs’ search for a place to live speaks for a number of Jewish Communist and Social Democrat réémigrés’ experiences. Prive Friedjung also secured her postwar apartment through the help of her Party comrades.\textsuperscript{70} Connections and chance, often through or with Party contacts, combined to help these returnees solve problems with which other Jews struggled. Such networks also helped individuals find and secure jobs. Hannah Fischer worked with youngsters in the Communist Party’s nursery school. She had begun to care for children while in exile in England, working with Anna Freud and, later, in the Austrian Centre’s day nursery in London.\textsuperscript{71} There, she came into contact with Young Austria and the KPÖ, and her affiliation with the Party enabled continuity in her political activity and professional life when she returned to Vienna. She also continued her education in Austria, passing the Matura exam in the summer of 1946 to qualify to attend the university. She obtained a Magister (master’s degree) in education and a doctorate in psychology and education and, after studying medicine, became a psychologist at a children’s home.\textsuperscript{72} Her employment by and activity with the Communist Party fostered her career path.

Reconnecting within the reestablishing Party offices and groups provided these returnees with a sense of security and familiarity. Without a true home abroad, their parties had served as such, their fellow members an ersatz family. Many found themselves in what should have been the familiar streets and neighborhoods of their hometown but feeling alone and alien. A place to go and a group to turn to helped one to feel anchored again. “The first days were full of seeking and not finding, trying to settle in, realizing one was alone, a stranger,” Stella Klein-Löw recalled. “Immediately after our

\textsuperscript{69} Tausig interview.

\textsuperscript{70} Friedjung, “Wir wollten nur das Paradies auf Erden,” 259.

\textsuperscript{71} Dieter J. Hecht, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, and Michaela Raggam-Blesch, Topographie der Shoah: Gedächtnisorte des zerstörten jüdischen Wien (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2015), 565.

\textsuperscript{72} Fischer, interview by author.
arrival, I went to the new Party [SPÖ] headquarters in Löwelstraße. The rooms were strange, but there were friends there. They knew me, I knew them. Hugs—happy smiling faces—memories—conversations—plans."73

Members of Young Austria found continuity and familiarity in the Freie Österreichische Jugend (FÖJ), the Communist Party’s youth movement in Austria. FÖJ leaders maintained contact with those who were still in England, reminding them of their duty to their country with messages like, “When are you finally coming? Each individual is needed. Every right thinking young Austrian is welcome here. And still more so, our well trained youth leaders. There is work for everyone.”74

As the Young Austria leaders had been trained, they returned and took positions heading the youth movement in Austria.75 Robert Rosner and his wife, Elisabeth Rosner-Jellinek, got back to Vienna in 1946. Robert soon assumed a leadership role with Young Austria in the nearby town of St. Pölten, while Elisabeth worked there as a nurse in a factory and continued with the Party in her free time. Their Party-related functions and involvement enabled the Rosners to establish themselves anew in Austria, and the following year, they relocated to Vienna, where Robert began chemistry studies at the University of Vienna. Austrian obstacles, however, challenged his academic pursuits. British high school studies had not included Latin, which the Austrian Matura required. Experience and understanding “the Austrian way,” as Robert said, helped him circumvent this obstacle. Perhaps “the Viennese way” would have been more specific; he and other Viennese Jews were, after all, Viennese. Socialized and conditioned in a more or less typical prewar Viennese childhood, Robert still had the awareness and understanding of how to get things accomplished in the framework of that society. With the help of a sympathetic official in the ministry of education who directed him to a Frauen Oberschule (a women’s high school), Robert had his British diploma certified as equivalent to the Austrian Matura because the curriculum of girls’ schools did not require Latin. Thus, he

received his Austrian *Matura*, and his diploma shows that he officially graduated from a women’s school. In his words, “Typically Austrian!”

Other returnees found work with the Allied occupation forces, utilizing language and intercultural skills. Anny Friedler worked for the *Welt am Montag*, the French occupation forces’ newspaper in Vienna. Hansi Tausig worked with the youth section of the Austrian-Soviet Friendship Society the first year she returned, striving to build bridges between the Soviets and the locals. Later she was employed by the KPÖ as a secretary and organizer in the Party’s nineteenth-district offices. Hansi recalled gaining a position quite easily, but this was due to her Party ties. She recalled working diligently in the community and in public places and remembered the bewilderment and confusion of former Nazis whom she and her colleagues engaged in conversation. They labored furiously to promote their ideals and to help shape politics and a future in their hometown, while Hansi remembers that “the old Nazis simply sat around” or looked at them with puzzled faces that seemed to say that only “the meshuggeneh [Yiddish for “crazy person”] would work so hard.”

Others sought to continue their prewar occupations or to reintegrate themselves into everyday Viennese business life. Unlike positions in the Party, work in private firms did not provide insulation from public opinion. A colleague told the Jewish Communist réémigré Walter Kammerling that surviving Jews had “slipped through the grates in the oven” and proceeded to outline the government’s need to reengage the company to build them better.

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76. Robert Rosner, interview by author, Vienna, Austria, August 13, 2009. Dealing with his lack of Latin studies continued for Robert. After a long and successful career as a chemist, he retired and returned to the university to study the history of science. Instead of enrolling in the history department, he registered as a student of political science and made his sideline focus the history of science. Again, he avoided a Latin requirement in the “typically Austrian” way.

77. Anny Friedler, interview, 173, DÖW. *Welt am Montag* was published from February 18, 1946, to February 28, 1948, in Vienna.

78. Tausig interview.

Disappointing Responses from Gentiles

Like Kammerling, many returnees to Vienna encountered responses from non-Jewish Austrians that ranged from deep denial of their suffering to outright antisemitism. Jewish Communists and Social Democrats soon realized that, contrary to the information provided by their parties, neither the nation as a whole nor individual Austrians actually desired their return because they were Jewish. A 1946 poll of Austrian citizens indicated that only 28 percent of respondents wanted Austrian Jews abroad to come back, and 46 percent explicitly opposed it.80

Gentile Austrians perceived Jewish returnees as foreigners and no longer—and perhaps as never having been—Austrians.81 At the same time, Jews returning from exile also frequently met the accusation of having abandoned Austria, despite the death sentence they would have faced had they remained.82 Austrians even questioned Jews’ motivations for return, as they held that life for the émigrés surely had been better in their lands of exile. Others praised them for their foresight in escaping the fate of gentile Vien-

These responses from gentile Austrians reflected their unwillingness to confront the grim situation of Jews in Nazi Austria and expressed their denial of having been a part of the oppression and persecution of Jews. When Hannah Fischer visited her former home after the war, a neighbor greeted her as a long-lost friend. A convinced Nazi from the start, this man had been in the SA, yet he received Hannah as if she had been dear to his family and related fond memories of her parents. Unable to bear his denial, she never visited her old home again, although even in 2013, she lived

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82. Vansant, Reclaiming Heimat, 49.
nearby. On another occasion, Walter Kammerling felt the emotional blow when he heard an acquaintance wax nostalgic for the Nazis on a snowy winter day. In the “good old days,” the man lamented, they had been fortunate to have the Jews to clear the streets of the city.

When gentile Austrians spoke with Jews of their wartime experiences in Vienna, they emphasized how frightened they had been of Allied bombings and the devastation these had wrought. At the same time, they utterly refused to recognize Jewish refugees’ situations abroad, much less why they had fled. Returnees, by contrast, knew that their neighbors had welcomed the Nazis into Austria and had been Nazis themselves and that many had taken part willingly in the exploitation of Jews in “Aryanization” processes. The Jewish réémigré Hans Thalberg wrote of linguistic confusion in discussions with gentile Austrians in postwar Vienna—their reference to “catastrophe” meant something very different from his use of the word, he noted. For Thalberg and other Jews, the Anschluss in 1938 had been the disaster; for many gentile Austrians, the disaster was the end of the war in 1945 and subsequent Allied occupation.

Larger, symbolic differences were apparent in Viennese society and culture and reflected the nation’s and its citizens’ struggle to secure a new and specifically not German postwar identity. Viennese survivor George Clare observed a new prevalence of Viennese dialect as evidence of this: even the educated citizen seemed to reject the softer, prewar Viennese version of Hochdeutsch (High German) for a working-class dialect that underscored their desire to be seen as utterly un-German. Viennese survivor and Social Democrat Hilde Spiel survived the war in exile in London and returned to Vienna early in 1946 as a British correspondent. In her diary, she described a new postwar style of wearing Tyrolean hats as an outward sign of Austrian patriotism and as decidedly not German. Keenly aware of the superficiality of this trend and its part in the assumed pretense of Austrian innocence and

84. Fischer interview by author.
85. Kammerling interview.
naïveté, Spiel pointed out that their footwear gave them away. Before the war, she wrote, one wore galoshes in the rain; afterward, the Viennese wore boots that betrayed them. To Spiel, they looked like Nazi camp guards and 1920s Berlin prostitutes.88

Still, many Social Democrat and Communist returnees claimed that they did not encounter much antisemitism in the postwar years and little or none within their parties. Hansi Tausig recalled only one antisemitic remark from a comrade who expressed disgust when she realized that two new members were Jewish. Other than that, Tausig stressed, prejudice within the KPÖ posed no problem. In her view, “there were too many Jews among us” for antisemites in the Party to dare voice their opinions.89 The critical mass of Jews in the Communist and Social Democrat Parties supported the repatriates, in addition to silencing antisemites. One woman who returned from Moscow and remained active with the KPÖ in postwar Vienna said, “I got together only with our people,” specifying that by “our people” she meant not other Communists but rather Communists of Jewish descent. Such a great number of Jewish Communists had returned from England and had shared experiences that they were able to form a core and significant part of the Party.90

Many Jewish returnees also related a similar lack of antisemitism in postwar Austria. They knew it existed and suspected who among their friends and acquaintances had held Nazi sympathies and perhaps still harbored them after the war. But in the process of reconstructing a national identity in the postwar period and for many decades thereafter, silence and a refusal to discuss the activities and events between 1938 and 1945 contributed to insulating Austrian Jews from antisemitic sentiment as they rebuilt lives in Vienna. If the gentiles kept quiet, so did the Jews. Refusing to probe or question neighbors’ wartime activities, returnees could cling to ignorance.

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88. Spiel, Rückkehr nach Wien, 37. It is important to note that, although Spiel maintained close postwar ties with Vienna, her permanent residence was in London (with a brief stint in Berlin) until 1963, when she returned to live in Austria. From 1955 on, however, she did own and use a second home in St. Wolfgang in Upper Austria.

89. Tausig interview.

about the gentile Austrians around them. At the same time, Jews’ discretion permitted gentile Austrians to ignore their neighbors’ suffering and hardship and to focus on the present, thus allowing former Nazis or Nazi sympathizers to interact with and develop relationships with Jews as necessary or desired without confronting the issue of responsibility. Although many returnees reported that they heard and felt no direct antisemitism from the people around them, as we shall see in chapter 6, their recounting of difficulties with reparations and restitution, regaining homes and businesses, and struggles with the bureaucracy belie this narrative.

POSTWAR POLITICAL REALITY FOR JEWISH RETURNEES

The political climate in postwar Austria dashed KPÖ plans for serious involvement in reconstruction. Leaders watched as a coalition between the newly renamed Austrian Socialist Party (Sozialistische Partei Österreichs, or SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, or ÖVP), the successor to Austria’s Catholic conservative Christian Social Party, took hold in the first elections held in November 1945, and they worried that this would affect the return of Austrian Communist Party members from exile abroad. The government proved unwilling to accommodate Jews in particular, despite their positions of disadvantage after the Holocaust and the destruction of their families and community. An official stated effort to show no “preferential treatment” for any particular group prompted Jews to turn to the Viennese Jewish Community for support, and even Communist Party members joined the IKG for the first time. Indeed, Communist members took a leading role in governing and guiding the rebuilding of the Jewish community.

The KPÖ lost ground with Jewish repatriates in the years that followed. Even the most devout Party members were bitterly disappointed by the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. The few who did not leave the Party disillusioned at that time withdrew their membership in 1968. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to put down the Prague
Spring liberalizations prompted most remaining Jewish Communist Party members to give up their affiliation.

**Elections, Coalition Government, and a New Austrian Identity**

At war’s end, the possibilities for KPÖ participation in the new government appeared bright. In the provisional government ordered by the Soviet occupiers and headed by the Social Democrat Dr. Karl Renner, Communists held one-third of all offices. This initial, if temporary, constellation corresponded with the Free Austrian Movement’s plan for the postwar government, but elections held on November 25, 1945, proved to be the first official and public disappointment for the Communist Party, as it garnered only 5.2 percent of the vote and not the expected 20 to 25 percent. Years of anticommunist propaganda and the hardships of a brutal Red Army conquest of Austria had done their work: the KPÖ did not appeal to voters. Most Austrian Jewish exiles in Great Britain still lived there in November 1945, and Party officials worried that the poor electoral results would deter some from proceeding with plans to return to Vienna. The Austrian Centre faithful had anticipated a very different Second Republic. “That was really the first shock,” said Hansi Tausig. KPÖ leaders already in Austria sent messages of encouragement to their colleagues in Britain, Hansi among them. She recalled that they stressed that the disappointing results constituted all the more reason to repatriate and work hard toward their political goals in postwar Austria.

The SPÖ, on the other hand, enjoyed tremendous electoral success. A new attitude had formed toward a party that was once on the margins. The populace no longer viewed the SPÖ as a revolutionary force as it had at the turn of the century and in the interwar period. Jewish Social Democrat returnees truly found a role in the reclaiming and rebuilding of postwar Austria. A coalition of the SPÖ and the ÖVP led the Austrian government

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92. Ibid., 233.
93. Tausig interview.
from November 1945 until 1966. Both groups used an antifascist narrative to anchor a national victim identity and competed for the votes of former Nazi Party members.\textsuperscript{94} In the postwar setting of reconstruction and Allied occupation, the theme of national identity and presenting Austria as a victim on the world stage brought political parties together in rare consensus, but the competing ideologies of the interwar period that had led to violence and civil war had not disappeared. Rather, pragmatic Austrian leaders realized the need to avoid fierce partisan politics and devoted themselves to ideological reconciliation.\textsuperscript{95} This and the commitment to re-create an Austrian Second Republic included reintegrating former Nazi Party members into professional and political society. Parties vied for the electoral support of former Nazis and determined that doing so required an official silence about the past that paralleled and fortified the silence taking root in society.\textsuperscript{96} This reintegration took place during the denazification program, a process controlled by the Allies in occupied Germany. In Austria, however, the occupying forces gave the provisional government the responsibility of carrying out such investigations, hearings, and prosecutions and, in doing so, handed over any control over the imposition of any consequences on former Nazis, a large group of potential voters who were exonerated, regained their jobs, and received compensation for losses incurred postwar. Politicians claiming that they sought to provide equally for all citizens—all victims of the Nazi regime—could do so while favoring former Nazis and refusing to acknowledge Jewish victims’ particular suffering and loss. This amounted to extreme disadvantages for Jewish returnees. In the name of treating all Austrians equally, leaders opposed benefits or budget lines for the Jewish community. Agriculture minister Josef Kraus discouraged


an advance of funds to be made to the IKG from a pool of heirless Jewish assets plundered by the Nazis, as he argued that this would give preferential treatment to a specific group. 97 Minister of internal affairs and SPÖ representative Oskar Helmer concurred, claiming it would contribute to “a perpetuation of distinctions” that the government aimed to avoid. 98

Thus, the Austrian government, cloaked in the national innocence of “first victim,” denied compensation or special benefits to Jewish victims but at the same time remunerated former Nazi Party affiliates for damages incurred through Allied-enforced anti-Nazi sanctions. By the logic of the victim myth, the German government carried responsibility for reparations and restitution to Jews. The Austrian government, however, assumed accountability to compensate former Austrian Nazis as theoretically victimized, like all Austrian citizens, by a German military occupation and then, again, a second time by the Allies. In the world of political maneuvering, this made sense, especially as it was rooted in Austria’s long history of antisemitism. Gaining votes from a tiny Jewish community meant nothing; Austrian Nazis needed to be won over, appeased, and reintegrated.

As leading politicians in the postwar period set their sights on the large pool of Nazi sympathizers, they went beyond abandoning Jews who had returned. They castigated Jews for forsaking their country in its time of need. If gentile Austrian citizens took that position, their leaders reinforced their perspective. ÖVP politician Alfons Gorbach contrasted Jewish emigrants who sought refuge in comfort and safety abroad after the Anschluss with Austrian soldiers who had fought in the Wehrmacht on the front. 99 The Vorarlberger Volksblatt went so far as to blame world Jewry specifically for not coming to Austria’s aid after the Anschluss. 100 For many gentile Austrians, the rationalization that Austrian Jews had deserted their country


99. Ibid., 226.

100. Ibid.
was further strengthened by the perception that Jews worldwide had supported them in doing so.

Despite the discouraging election results and negative attitudes of the government, Communist Party officials established the Free Austrian World Movement (FAWM) in Vienna by late 1945 and officially announced the opening of its offices in February 1946. With the initial political goal of the movement achieved—a free, independent, democratic Austria—they aimed to help organize relief and assistance for the country, to facilitate the return of their members, and to maintain representation in the newly formed government.¹⁰¹

Austrian Jewish exiles hoping for a gesture of welcome and invitation to return home would be disappointed. Communist city council member Viktor Matejka was the only member of the postwar government to extend an official invitation. In November 1945, the New York–based German-language publication of the American Federation of Austrian Democrats, the Austro-American Tribune, published his appeal to Jewish artists and other members of the intelligentsia to come back to Austria.¹⁰² Incidents of invitation in most cases amounted to little more than a token and symbolic statement, but Social Democrat Ernst Lachs was one of very few émigrés to return in response to an offer to take a place in the postwar municipal government. He and his wife, Minna, had met before the Anschluss in a Socialist student group and remained committed to their party through their time in exile in the United States, where they and their son, Tommy, survived the war. Ernst began working toward their return to Vienna immediately after war’s end, and indeed his initiative was the only thing that propelled Minna’s decision to go back. Without his drive to rejoin compatriots in Austria for postwar reconstruction, she might have remained in the United States. Ernst departed for Vienna on January 24, 1947, and Minna and Tommy set sail from New York to join him at the end of August 1947.¹⁰³ Once back, Minna too resumed a career in local government as a

¹⁰¹ Marietta Bearman and Charmian Brinson, “‘No Easy Matter’: Closure and After,” in Bearman et al., Out of Austria, 243.
¹⁰² Vansant, Reclaiming Heimat, 43.
¹⁰³ Minna Lachs, Zwischen zwei Welten (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1992), 171, 177–78.
teacher and ultimately took an enterprising lead in introducing and incorporating the study of the persecution of Austrian Jews through exhibitions and programs on the topic.

Socialist success notwithstanding, a continued lack of support and assistance from the Austrian government prevailed. Before the Anschluss, many politically engaged Social Democrat and Communist Jews had been reluctant to join the IKG. But in the particular context of postwar Vienna, many turned to the Jewish community for backing and aid and took part as formal members.

The IKG and the SPÖ and KPÖ in Postwar Reconstruction

As the immediate postwar Austrian government policies and assistance benefited only those victims identifiable as resistance fighters, Jews turned to the IKG for sustenance. Of the many atheistic and even antireligious Social Democrat and Communist returnees of Jewish heritage, a number joined the Viennese Jewish community as formal members. The IKG and foreign Jewish charities served as a means of support, while the Austrian government and the camp-survivor organization in Vienna helped only those who had been persecuted on political grounds. The community provided clothing, access to food (via the Joint), and assistance in securing housing.

As the IKG gained Communist members, KPÖ representatives played an increased role in Jewish community politics. The IKG fell under the purview of the Staatsamt für Volksaufklärung, Unterricht, Erziehung und Kultusangelegenheiten (State Office of Public Information, Education, and Religious Affairs, comparable to Austria’s current Ministry of Education). The secretary of that office in September 1945 was Ernst Fischer, a longtime KPÖ member and politician, and he named his KPÖ colleague and journalist David Brill as provisional head of the IKG. A number of other KPÖ members helped advise Brill and worked in supporting roles.  

The community’s first free elections took place on April 7, 1946, but KPÖ and SPÖ Jewish leaders had already established the Jüdische Komitee (Jewish Committee) to try to unite Vienna’s Jews under one umbrella. They recognized the weak position of their community in postwar Austria and sought to overcome their differences. The voting members of the Jewish community elected Brill in April 1946 to continue as the IKG president.\textsuperscript{105} Few of those who were elected even had affiliated publicly as Jews before 1938, and left-wing Jewish groups had held no influence over community politics previous to the Anschluss. Postwar reconstruction, however, took place under these leftist parties that formerly had been at the fringes of formal Jewish communal life and showed little interest in the religious needs of the community.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Disillusionment with Communism}

Steadfast conviction and dedication to Communist political and social values kept many Jewish Communists devoted to and active in their party. As the chasm between theory and practice visibly widened over the course of the next decade, however, such loyalty eroded, and many Austrian Jewish

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 41. See also Ralph Segalman, “Letters to My Grandchildren” (unpublished memoir, Northridge, CA, 2001), 85–88. Segalman, a social worker with the JDC in postwar Vienna, described his role as an election monitor and Joint representative and claimed that, in fact, the General Zionists had won the election and on that same day agreed to form a coalition administration with the Jewish Chamber of Commerce. By the following morning, Segalman reported, the Jewish Communist group had taken control of the IKG. He related reports from General Zionist and Jewish Chamber of Commerce leaders that a squad of Red Army soldiers had detained them in the middle of the night and threatened deportation to Siberia and harm to their families if they refused to sign over authority to the Jewish Communist group. They agreed and acquiesced; Segalman protested, he claimed, by refusing to hand over the Joint food and medicine warehouse to the IKG. Joseph Schwartz, then the head of Joint operations in Europe, overruled him, and Segalman resigned in protest. More than a decade later, however, Schwartz explained that the Soviets had threatened to close the borders to the east (to Hungary, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany) altogether if the Joint continued to refuse to work with the IKG’s Communist leadership. He felt that it was his only choice, as it served a greater number of Jews in need.

\textsuperscript{106} Susanne Cohen-Weisz, \textit{Jewish Life in Austria and Germany since 1945: Identity and Communal Reconstruction} (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 89.
Communists left the Party. As the reality of the nature of the Soviet Union’s brutal oppression in the name of Communism became clear, many grew disillusioned over the following decade. The Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 ultimately sparked an exodus of those who had lost faith in the system, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia following the 1968 Prague Spring prompted most of the rest to abandon the KPÖ. Many turned to the SPÖ to reroot themselves in their political home.

Hansi Tausig was one of the steadfast. Although disenchanted with Communism during the Hungarian Uprising, she remained loyal until 1968, when she let her membership lapse. “It just fizzled out,” she said in reference to her official status with the Party but also in seeming metaphoric reference to her own convictions. “I didn’t make a big deal of it.” At the time, Hansi worked at a firm run by people connected to the Party, and she felt it would have been unwise to make a scene about leaving and risk being fired. Many others, she said, left the KPÖ quietly, so as to avoid such repercussions. This was no easy decision. Hansi likened it to losing one’s faith. “It was like a religion. . . . We were not religious [but the] Communist Party . . . was like a religion. And then all of a sudden you are without religion.” Abruptly, former committed Communists lost their guiding ideology and found nothing to replace it. Hansi characterized the feeling as “a little bit like falling into a . . . nothing.”

Other KPÖ members found Austria impossible to bear without the foundation and commitment to their Party. Disillusionment with Communism and the Soviet activity in Hungary overtook Walter Kammerling in 1956, and he became ill. After two weeks in bed, he decided not only to give up the Communist Party but also to give up on Austria altogether. In 1957, he returned to England, where he had survived the war in exile, and never again lived in his hometown.

107. Tausig interview.
108. Ibid. In our interview, Hansi admitted to avid support of the SPÖ chancellor Bruno Kreisky. Ties to her original party lingered as she confessed, “I still feel a little guilty saying that, but I truly did love him.”
109. Kammerling interview.
Most returning Jewish Communists, however, stayed and reestablished homes once again in Vienna, with or without the KPÖ. Many Communists turned to the Socialist Party. Postwar Austria and Communism had failed to meet their expectations; but Vienna was their home, and they remained. And the SPÖ provided a strong continuity and possibility for representation and participation in the politics of the Second Republic.

A number of idealistic and committed young Jewish Social Democrats and Communists returned to Vienna beginning in the fall of 1945 and through 1946. All were eager to reclaim their home and to help rebuild an independent democratic republic. This commitment, along with pressure from their parties, guided their expectations and actions to remigrate to Vienna and to stay, even in the face of the disappointment and, for some, disillusionment that followed. Contrary to the assumptions they had held throughout the war years, Austrian society was not prepared to welcome Jewish returnees, no matter their political affiliation.

On the contrary, the victim myth that in large part traced its origins to the sentiments of Austrian refugee groups abroad—which included many Jews—had been further cemented with the wording of the 1943 Moscow Declaration and had taken hold in the postwar Austria in which they arrived. This allowed Austrians, from government officials to everyday men and women in the streets, to claim that Austrian Jews who fled the Nazis had abandoned their country in its time of need and had not suffered like the Austrian victims who had remained. Despite full knowledge that Austrian Jews had been stripped of their citizenship and robbed of their property, homes, and businesses, gentile Austrians and their leaders ignored the reality of Jews’ forced emigration, resettlement, and deportation to concentration and death camps. Instead they considered Austrian Jews’ flight unpatriotic and traitorous, employing a variant of an older disloyalty myth that viewed Jews as members of a separate nation and unable to be loyal to any other. They reasoned that they had suffered while Jews abroad had waited out the war in ease.

While the Austrian Communist Party in Britain had maintained a consistent platform of support for the reestablishment of an independent
Austria, the Social Democrat Party in exile had wavered and at least in part had continued a post-1918 endorsement of unification with Germany. With the turn of postwar Cold War politics, those Social Democrats who returned ironically had the opportunity with their party’s success to take significant part in rebuilding the country. Rééémigré Communists’ intentions and plans met with both personal and organizational disappointment and a marginalization from national politics.

When I asked Hansi Tausig why she and her Jewish colleagues and friends returned to Vienna, she replied, “Because we were naïve!” She, like so many other politicized Jews living in exile, had believed the victim myth. It was not simply a right-wing creation to pardon former Nazis. The Left and even Jewish members of the Communist and Social Democratic Parties had believed it and with deep conviction. The myth helped motivate their return and justified the attachment and dedication they felt to a homeland that had forced their emigration, destroyed their communities, and robbed and murdered their families. Once disabused of their naïveté, why did they stay? When I reminded Hansi of her other options and asked why she neither returned to England nor joined family in the United States, she seemed puzzled: “Why would I do that? This is my home.”

110. Tausig interview.