

What Americans should know about the 'Anschluss'

by Friedrich Höss
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The following article was drafted by His Excellency Friedrich Höss, Ambassador of Austria to the United States, and submitted to the New York Times for publication on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Austria by Germany, the so-called Anschluss, this past March. Its purpose was to correct misleading reporting in the New York Times and other major U.S. media, which attempted to distort the Anschluss into a veritable "invitation" by the Austrians for the Nazis to occupy their country.

The New York Times refused to publish Ambassador Höss's article, and he has made it available to Executive Intelligence Review for publication here.

It is because of the memory and the dignity of all those Austrian patriots who gave their lives fighting the National Socialist German Workers Party or otherwise suffering under National Socialist aggression, that I write this article in order to correct a historic view expressed in recent articles in the *New York Times*.

I was five-and-a-half years of age, when the invasion of the German troops took place on March 12, 1938, and I remember it well. On that day, five years of merciless and bloody battle and of the first organized state resistance in Europe against the National Socialist Workers Party and National Socialist Germany ended, under the more or less indifferent eyes of the then-statesmen of the world.

The battle, regrettably fought on one side by a Catholic authoritarian regime—which was one of the reasons it has never received full credit for it in Western democracies—started with the ban of the National Socialist German Workers Party in Austria on June 19, 1933, only six months after Hitler's ascendance to power in Berlin. It was soon intensified with the pastoral letter of the Austrian bishops rigorously condemning anti-Semitism.

The world did not seem to read the signs on the wall, when the National Socialists, unsuccessfully, staged a coup d'état on July 25, 1934, in the course of which they assassinated Austrian Chancellor Dr. Engelbert Dollfuss. One hundred seven people fell on the side of the government; 153

people, including those executed, were killed on the side of the National Socialists.

Despite mounting National Socialist terrorism and increasing pressure by Nazi Germany, Hitler was afraid of the "Plebiscite on a Free and Independent Austria" announced by Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg on March 9, 1938, to be held on March 13, 1938. It is the established view of all observers and historians that the overwhelming majority of Austrians would have voted against Hitler Germany. At the end of February 1938, the British Minister in Austria estimated the strength of the National Socialists in Austria at about 20% of the population. In order to avoid this plebiscite, Hitler gave the order to the German Army to invade Austria on March 11, 1938.

On that day, the world was silent. The legations of the Western powers were soon changed into consulates. In the *New York Herald Tribune* on March 12, 1938, reference is made to Cordell Hull as follows: "U.S. Attitude on Hitler Coup is 'Hands Off.' Hull defines stand as that of non-interference, denies U.S. joined Britain in protest note to Berlin." In Moscow, which together with Mexico protested the Anschluss, Stalin was otherwise busy in sentencing 21 of his adversaries to death.

At the same time when National Socialist supporters hailed Hitler in Vienna on March 15, practically the whole political leadership of Austria, together with leading communists, monarchists, and socialists were in prison: The country was politically and ideologically disarmed. During the next days, weeks and months, 70,000 people were arrested. Over the years, 35,000 political opponents together with about 65,000 Jewish fellow citizens should die in National Socialist concentration camps. Not quite the idea of a love affair.

After the incorporation of Austria into National Socialist Germany on March 13, her name was eliminated from official designations, the only authority being the central offices of the German administration and the National Socialist German Workers Party in Berlin. Some born Austrians, too many, subsequently participated in atrocities as individual citizens of the German Reich and members of the National Socialist German Workers Party. Austria, however, as a state, had ceased to exist.

Speaking about the rape of Austria, Winston Churchill said: "We can never forget here in this island that Austria was the first victim of Nazi aggression." It is in this spirit that in October 1943, the Allies, expressing the view of the governments of the anti-Nazi alliance, agreed during a conference in Moscow that "Austria, the first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression, shall be liberated from German domination." This declaration had nothing to do with the then far away Cold War, as recently alleged.

National Socialist horrors must never happen again. Therefore, we all must face the historic truth. But it should and must be the full truth. We owe it to those who died for the truth.