

Hans Hirsch, life and writing

Donald Hirsch September 2025, with lots of help from Tim

We recently came across a large set of papers of Hans Hirsch. Here is a brief summary of his remarkable life and writing. I have kept a paper folder of a selection of his articles and letters, and included some of them in this document to reflect themes.

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A short summary of Hans's life

Johann "Hans" Hirsch was born in Vienna in 1896 into a well-off Jewish family, with origins in different parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. His father Henri (Heinrich) Hirsch was born in Novi Sad, now in Serbia; while his mother, born Margarethe Gerstl, came originally from Prague. We got some idea of the extent of the family's wealth when seeing the brochure for the auction of the contents of their flat before his father left Vienna in 1936 – their estimated value added up to £1.31 million in 2025 money.

Hans had two younger brothers: Friedrich (Fritz), born in 1899, who died tragically young at the age of 10; and Stephan, 22 years Hans's junior, who changed his name to Steven Hudson while serving in special forces for the British during World War 2. Hans studied agricultural economics at Vienna's agricultural university (Universitat für Bodenkultur), where he achieved a doctorate. In the late 1910s and 1920s he left his socially conventional background behind, following the cause of socialism in the heady days of 'Red Vienna', and marrying Bettina Sperling, who had a similarly rebellious outlook (which Bettina said caused disapproval from her mother in law).

While initially applying some of his knowledge in industry (for example working as an economist in a sugar factory in the early 1920s), Hans was soon involved in trade union politics, and became a journalist on the Arbeiter Zeitung (Workers' Paper), the vehicle of the Austrian Social Democratic party. After the authoritarian 'Austro-fascist' regime suppressed a socialist uprising in early 1934, Hans was involved in producing an underground version of the paper, but the party and its newspaper eventually went into exile in Czechoslovakia. Bettina went ahead to London to investigate options to set up a new life there, while Hans and their two young children, Anni (b 1929) and Fritz/Fred (b 1931), remained in Vienna. After Hans was briefly imprisoned by the regime, he followed Bettina to London with the children at the end of 1934, and the family settled in England. In 1936, following the death of his mother, Hans's father Henri and younger brother Stephan (Steven), then aged 18, joined Hans and Bettina in London.

In London, they lived initially in Harley Road, near Swiss Cottage, with Hugh Gaitskell (see below), and in 1938 or 1939 moved to 72 Canfield Gardens, where they set up a boarding house which helped them make a living, alongside Hans's earnings from freelance journalism.

We had not heard much about Hans when growing up, and I had a picture of him as a detached figure writing lots of Socialist tracts in German, cut off from his roots. Nothing could be further from the truth. He wrote prolifically both in German and, increasingly, in perfect and indeed elegant English, and was published widely in British trade union papers and general publications including the New Statesman (often under pseudonyms, including Austriacus, Peer John and Hugh Jones). His writings were highly pertinent to the unfolding situation in the UK in the 1930s and early 40s, centring on various key themes.

Writing themes

Hans's writing during the mid-1930s focused in particular on what was going on in Austria. In this role, Hans was clearly more than just a journalist – he had close links with the Austrian Social Democratic Party in exile and [describes himself](#) as being its co-organiser in London. He had a particular mission to draw the attention of the British establishment and especially the UK Labour Party to the [suppression of trade unions](#) and the [plight of social democrats remaining in Austria](#), many of them personal friends of the Hirsches, who were locked up as political prisoners by the Austro-fascist regime of Kurt Schuschnigg, and eventually the German Nazis after Austria was annexed in 1938.

His writings [also warned](#), correctly, of the domino effect of central European countries falling to the Nazis, with part and then all of Czechoslovakia being annexed, before the invasion of Poland triggered war in Europe. As described below, this brought Hans into regular contact with influential figures on the British Left.

Hans had to fight an uphill battle to get the Austrian situation taken seriously, even by the British Left, let alone by the wider establishment. Indifference to Austria, in 1935, is illustrated in [this letter](#) from the League for Industrial Democracy in New York explaining why Hans's articles were not being published: Austria was clearly seen as a backwater to what was going on in Europe, especially in Italy and Germany.

In the UK, while many of the publications (especially trade union journals) rejected Hans's articles due to space limitations, many others were published.

While Hans's most distinctive contribution was to expose political persecution in Austria, he also wrote eloquently about the more general plight of refugees, and inevitably of what was happening to the Jews in the 1930s and 40s. The outstanding example of this that we found was [this 1939 manuscript](#) (it appears unpublished) of an eloquent essay of how the dispersal of Jews at that time differed from previous diaspora experiences. Previously whole communities had been moved on to another country; now, not just communities but families were being torn apart, because of the ways in which travel to new countries was being restricted. Much of this has amazing resonance with the difficulties faced by the displaced communities of the world in 2025, including references to refugees resorting to use of overcrowded and unsafe ships! The article is well worth a read, if only to admire the eloquence of a man not writing in his first language.

Another significant theme of Hans's writings, which became more prominent in the 1940s after the outbreak of war, concerns the role of socialism as an alternative to Nazism. Hans hoped that the German proletariat would rise up against the dictatorship, and encouraged the British government to stimulate this, e.g. by dropping leaflets behind enemy lines. Later, he wrote about his hopes for Austrian socialism after the war. While he did not live to see it, a state centred around a broadly social democratic consensus did in fact dominate Austria from the 1940s until at least the 1980s, and Bettina played a significant role in this following her return to Vienna in 1947.

It is worth noting that although Hans considered himself a socialist, and wrote about the possible rising up of the proletariat in authoritarian countries, he [made clear](#) his firm opposition to the dictatorship in the Soviet Union, most notably when it betrayed its cynicism by allying with Hitler in 1939. Indeed, [in writing about the future](#) "after Hitler", his big fear was Soviet-style authoritarianism ("national Bolshevism" replacing "national Socialism"), which of course proved a well-founded fear for neighbouring countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, if not for Austria itself. His widow Bettina witnessed this first hand as she watched the Soviet tanks roll into Budapest in 1956.

Finally, it is clear that Hans was not concerned just with abstract ideas or grand movements, but took a close interest in the minutiae of what was going on in the world. He had a regular column in the Railway Review (a trade union newspaper), of all places, called "This odd world", with hundreds of little two-sentence reports which would have fit well in the Twitter age. [Here is an example](#) from one issue.

Living in the UK

We don't have much by way of description of Hans's daily life in the UK, but some interesting information on some aspects. The thing that stands out most is the close links between Hans's family and members of the UK labour movement – people who were at that time relatively young, but went on to be well known names. This all started in 1933-34, when Hugh Gaitskell spent the academic year on a scholarship grant at the University of Vienna. Then a young economist involved in workers' education, and later leader of the Labour party, he built links with the Austrian Social Democrats just at the time of their suppression, and was active in helping many of them to leave the country. Having got to know Hans in Vienna, Gaitskell appears to have helped the family when they first came to London, and indeed they shared a rented house with Gaitskell and his wife for four years in Harley Road. Many of Hans's letters about what was going on in Austria are addressed to Gaitskell, but the connection was clearly personal and not just political. Indeed, [this remarkable letter](#) written to Bettina by Gaitskell's wife Dora after he died in 1963, aged 56 and on the brink of a Labour victory that would have made him prime minister, underlines just how close the link was.

Other names that crop up in this period include another future Labour leader, Michael Foot, a young journalist on the Evening Standard who Hans asked to help get his Jewish refugee article published. And in 1937 he wrote to a former Labour leader, George Lansbury, asking him for support in taking up the persecution of social democrats in a trip Lansbury was planning to Vienna (see letter in [linked archive](#)).

Hans used his links with the Labour Party not just to promote awareness but also to raise material help from Labour members for imprisoned Austrian Socialists and their families – establishing the “Austrian Socialist Relief Organisation” with Gaitskell and others. Later, shortly after the war ended (after Hans's death in 1944), the north London Labour Party organised food parcels for people in Vienna, where material conditions were dire. Members were asked for contributions of one pound two shillings per parcel. Bettina was closely involved, and kept correspondence from subscribers, which happened to include [a rather familiar name](#) from the British left.

The correspondence includes people like Edith Tudor-Hart, an Austrian-born photographer who was later exposed as a KGB spy who helped recruit Philby, Burgess and McLean (but there was never any hint that Hans was attracted to the Soviet cause). Tudor-Hart later produced a beautiful photo portrait of Anni as a young girl, which she kept in her living room for the rest of her life. In making an appeal for signatures in support of Austrian detainees, Hans also wrote to such luminaries as George Bernard Shaw, HG Wells and Harold Laski.

Hans's letters indicate a supportive engagement with his adopted country, despite being subject to various restrictions. He was interned on the Isle of Man for a few weeks as an “enemy alien” in summer 1940, yet less than a year earlier he had written to Gaitskell following up on an earlier remark by Gaitskell that refugees might be utilised to help with the war effort, and offering to use his networks to muster Austrian refugees. (We don't have any documents showing if this was followed up, though Gaitskell played a key role as a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Economic Warfare from 1940 onwards). It appears that Hans's brother Steven's enlistment in the Pioneer Corps of the Army as a ‘friendly enemy alien’ exempted him from internment.

Hans had a temporary job at the Luxembourg embassy early on in the war, but as this was coming to an end, expressed his willingness to do something directly useful like work in a munitions factory (again, no sign this actually happened). At the same time, his “enemy alien” status continued to have implications, most particularly for travel. He needed permission from the police to travel away from his registered address, including for example for a trip to St Albans, to where Anni’s school in Parliament Hill had been evacuated.

Hans died suddenly of a stroke in 1944. He was 47, about 9 months older than his son Fred was when he died of motor neurone disease 34 years later.

Hans self-profile, 1938

Introduction for a talk he was to give at a workers' education college

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24, Harley Road,
London, N. W. 3.

April 9th, 1938.

Mr. S. Rees,
18, Derwentdale Gardens,
High Heaton,
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 7.

Dear Comrade,

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I am glad that you agree to my suggestions.

As to details about myself: I am a Socialist journalist. I worked on our Social-Democratic paper in Vienna until it was suppressed in February, 1934. Afterwards I issued, commissioned by our underground movement, secretly an illegal periodical news sheet, containing information mainly for the foreign press correspondents and newspapers abroad. At the end of 1934 I was arrested, but nothing was found out, and after a short term of imprisonment I was released. I then left Austria and am living in England since, writing mainly for continental papers, but occasionally also for British labour and trade union papers (f.i. in this month "Labour" under the name of Austriacus). I am still in close contact with our underground movement in Austria and together with Gessner I represent the Austrian Socialist party here.

Looking forward to meeting you and my audience at Whitsun time,

I am,

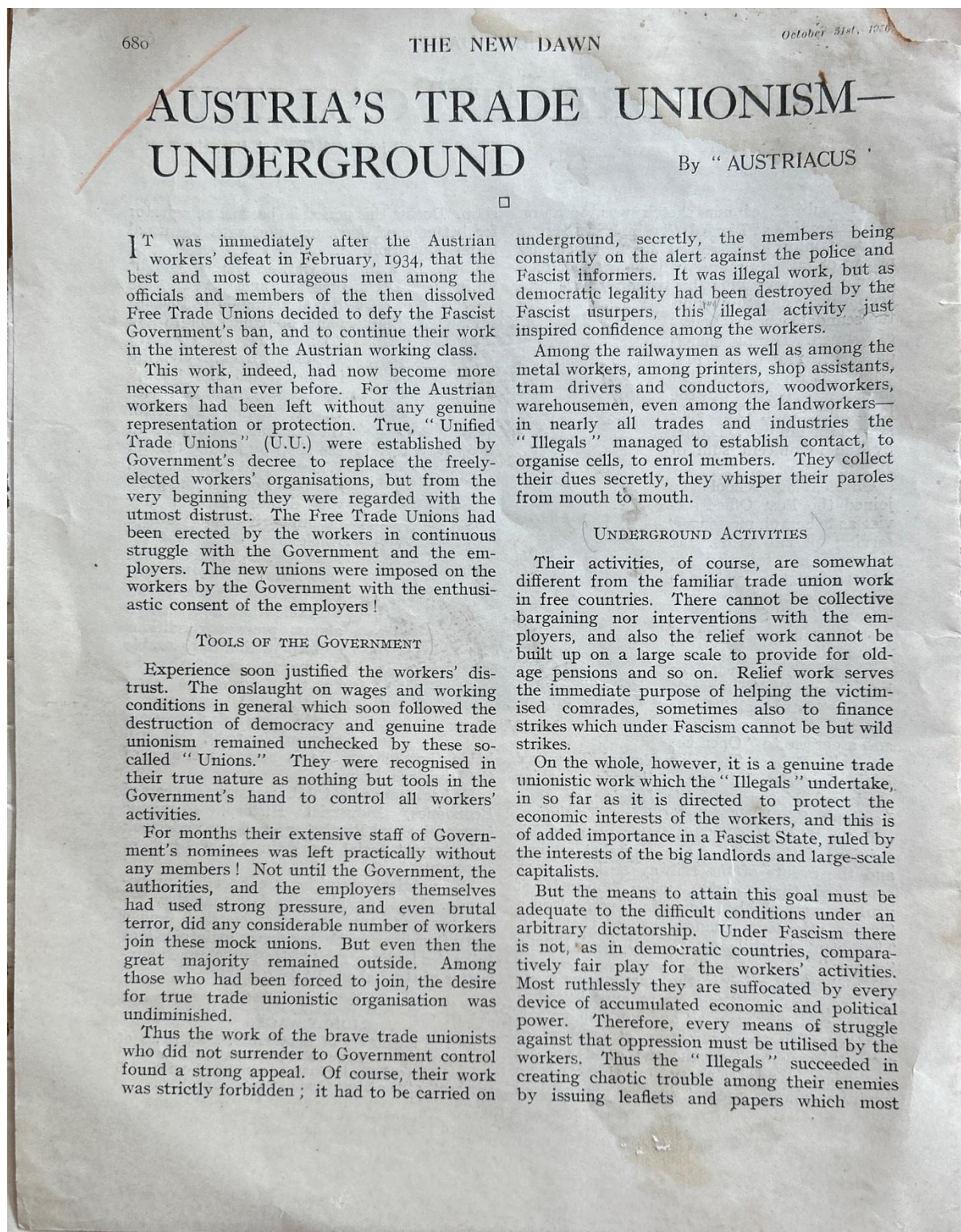
Yours fraternally,

Selected documents

Trade unions in Austria, 1936

This article in a UK trade union paper (NUDAW, a predecessor of USDAW) draws attention to how difficult it was for unions under fascist regimes, and describes aspects of their persecution. (See [document 2](#) for more details of treatment of prisoners)

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cunningly imitated the publications of the U.U., of the Fascist Heimwehr, and of the police. Not only types and headings, but also the appropriate phrases were so deceptively used that one had to read well on before one realised the devastating exposure of Austro-Fascism which they contained. The Government was compelled to warn the public by wireless and posters of these dangerous publications, giving them thereby the best publicity. And the police, puzzled and irritated, began to seize the genuine leaflets of the bogus U.U.'s!

SECRET NEWSPAPERS

An outstandingly well-composed *Trade Unionistic Information* (*Gewerkschaftliche Information*) is published weekly—secretly, of course, too!—for the cell leaders of the illegal trade unions, directing their activities to unified action. It impresses upon the workers that they themselves have to come into the foreground and fight their own fights, whether to remove some minor grievances in their own shop or to resist the general reduction of their wages and standard of living, or through solidarity to help their comrades.

Thus the "Illegals" work everywhere to arouse the activity of the workers which the U.U. tries to lull and to dull with demagogic promises and fallacious advice to rely on the Government's "good will." They give the lead to the members of the U.U.'s to bring pressure to bear upon their impotent "bosses" to fulfil their promises. These are then compelled to show their true nature; they exclude "rebellious" members, and sometimes even denounce them to the police!

Trade unionism under Fascism necessarily becomes politically-minded. For in its efforts to better the workers' economic conditions it

very soon finds the barriers of the autocratic State denying any genuine workers' movement. Thus the overthrow of Fascism is the primary condition of economic progress for the workers. Complete restoration of the workers' freedom, free elections, free speech, free Press for Labour are the immediate aims of the illegal trade unions in Austria.

PERSECUTION

Small wonder, therefore, that they are feared, hated, and severely persecuted by the Fascist authorities—no less than their close allies, the political underground organisations of the Austrian workers. Members of the illegal trade union in a big Viennese shoe factory were not only arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, but also shockingly beaten by the police. Organising genuine unions is punishable as high treason in present-day Austria; the young woodworkers' leader, Rudolf Holowaty, was condemned to ten years' hard labour for having written some pamphlets, addressed to his fellow-workers, exhorting them to re-establish their free union. When an outcry throughout the civilised world followed, and the International Federation of Trade Unions and the International Labour Office in Geneva vigorously protested, the Austrian Supreme Court reduced this outrageous sentence to six years' hard labour!

But even such cruel persecution did not succeed in breaking the Austrian workers' spirit. There is in to-day's Austria an *underground mass trade union movement*—a unique phenomenon in the long and glorious history of trade unionism. If the free countries preserve Austria from being over-run by Hitler and his sinister forces, then the Austrian workers themselves will have the strength and determination to get rid of their Fascist masters.

□

HUCKNALL BRANCH OBTAINS RESULTS

At the Hucknall Society's quarterly meetings last January the branch were successful in securing an alteration of the society's rules to allow of two employees to sit upon the board of management, and at the quarterly meeting, held on October 12th, 1936, they were successful in electing both employee representatives as follows:—

Mr. George Johnson, branch chairman (retired a year ago owing to a serious illness), and

Mr. W. Carpenter (elected twelve months ago to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Johnson's retirement). Mr. Johnson tied for head of the poll with 196 votes. Mr. Carpenter secured 186 votes. Three required.

In addition to the two employees (N.U.D.A.W. representatives) they have two other N.U.D.A.W. members on the society's board of management: Mr. Fred Butler, president of the society (C.I.S. employee) and Councillor W. Mee (three years chairman, Hucknall Urban District Council, 1933-1936).

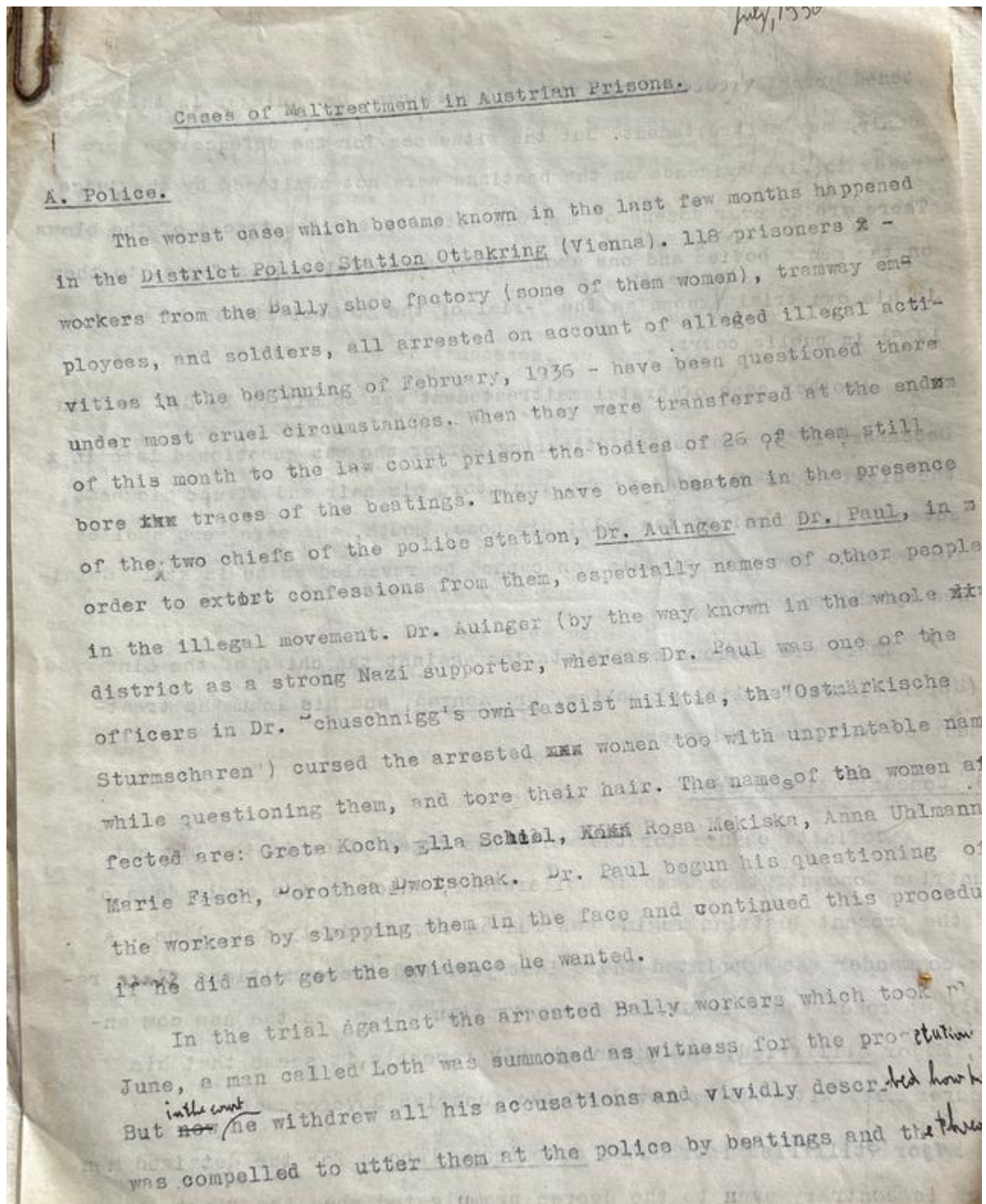
Mr. W. Knight (N.U.D.A.W. employee) was also re-elected to the education committee.

Further, the branch has just secured 100 per cent. political contracting-in, the last outstanding case being secured a week ago. The branch was listed as "No Arrears" at the end of last year and intend to be so again this year-end C.W.O.

Description of plight of political prisoners, 1936

While articles such as the previous one talk about political persecution in fairly general terms, this unpublished one is the most graphic about actual prisoner conditions, including an amazingly early description of "concentration camps", though used in the sense of rounding up and isolating political troublemakers, not the later Nazi context of extermination.

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tened arrest ~~arrest~~ of his wife and children. Dr. Auinger in this trial denied any maltreatment. But the witnesses for the defence who were ready to give evidence on the beatings were not admitted/ by the judge. There are however dozens of men who actually saw the traces of the blows on the men's bodies and one among them, Roman Felleis, referred to them in his own trial (known as the "Trial of the 30 Socialists" in April, 1936) in public court.

Another case of brutal maltreatment was committed by Dr. Paul in December, 1935, against an Ottakring worker who was questioned late in the night and badly beaten. Dr. Paul tore his hair and struck his head several times against the wall; his nose, mouth, and ears were swollen for weeks.- The name of this man cannot be revealed as he is still detained by the police.

There are serious complaints too against the chief of the Linz (Upper-Austria) political police, Dr. Konrad, and his inhumane treatment of political prisoners.

B. Concentration Camps.

A definite change for the worse has taken place in the biggest Austrian Concentration Camp of Wöllersdorf, which in the early days of the present Austrian regime was run on comparatively fair lines. A new commander was appointed there last year and the conditions have rapidly approach those in German Concentration Camps. As the new commander, Major Stillfried, was promoted only recently, it seems that his measures meet with the approval of the Austrian Government.

Major Stillfried introduced compulsory labour for the detained men which is contrary even to the decree promulgated when the first concen-

tration camps were erected); the work (building of roads and barracks) is not only very exhausting, but ~~dangerous~~ too for the unskilled men, and several accidents (lime spurtings into the eyes etc. ^{hand taking place}). Moreover, the treatment as a whole became brutal and provocative. Major Stillfried issued an order x to the gendarmes in charge to use their rubber truncheons. In October, 1935, one of the prisoners, named Goliasch, tried to escape; he was recaptured and, though handcuffed, beaten by Major Stillfried personally with a rubber truncheon, so that his wounds had to be stitched by the doctors. Thereupon a hungerstrike broke out in the barracks concerned ("Objekt 105"); the alleged ringleaders were taken into penitentiary cells and one of them, named Cihak, was badly beaten in his cell.

In November, 1935, a small breach of discipline (smoking after 9 p.m.) led to such brutal scenes that three of the prisoners suffered considerable nervous shock; another five were slapped in the faces and beaten with rubber truncheons.

Night inspections are a favourite sport of Major Stillfried; the prisoners are awakened and have to line up in military order in their sleeping rooms; if they are not in perfect order they get cursed and punished. In June, 1936, ~~xxx~~ at one of these inspections, the prisoner Otto Kuska was disciplined for a week; he made a complaint to the Federal Chancellery, but Major Stillfried urged him to withdraw it, and when he refused it, he was slapped by the Major in the face twice and treated by one of the gendarmes present with the rubber truncheon until he was bleeding. In addition he was punished by being confined to a dark cell for a week. In the first night of this penitentiary confinement ~~xxx~~ Kuska tried to commit suicide by opening the wrist arteries. This incident caused considerable unrest among his fellow prisoners and many of them were given disciplinary punishment in this connexion; among them were: Dr.

David, Dr. Dirmeyer, Raab, Resnicek, Kubicek, Kaliwoda, Siegfried Färnberg, and Weber. Even the drinking water supply was stopped for part of the concentration camp as a punishment - and this in the heat of ~~XXXXX~~ June!

Of Law Court Prisons.

Though there are no cases of physical violence ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ in the Law Courts Prisons known, conditions in the most important one (the "Landesgericht I., Wien") became worse too in the last year by another change in command: the new governor, Heinrich Geissler, cancelled most of the privileges which political prisoners are given by the regulations. They are now kept, even if only on remand, in the same cells as ordinary criminals, they are not allowed to bring with them comb and brush, the cells are filthy and bug infested. The most serious complaints against the food which is almost uneatable for human beings. The prisoners therefore are starving; "hunger" cries are often heard from the cells. Like most of the Austrian prisons the Viennese Law Court Prison too is badly overcrowded. (The recent amnesty has possibly changed this latter fact)!

There are similar complaints against the Linz (Upper-Austria) & Law Court Prison, especially in connexion with the bad food.

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Fascism over Europe, 1938

On the eve of the Anschluss, Hans's analysis of Austria's folly in thinking that home-grown fascism could save Austria from Nazi domination

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2

FASCISM OVER EUROPE

AUSTRIA—CZECHOSLOVAKIA—AND THEN?

The Wider Implications of the Austrian Tragedy

BY AN AUSTRIAN SOCIALIST

The writer of the following article was on the staff of a Socialist paper in Vienna until its suppression in 1934. Following a period in the Austrian "underground" movement, he came to this country, and has contributed articles to many British journals, being still in close contact with many of his comrades in Austria.

Four years ago, when we stood among the ruins of the workers' flats in the streets of Vienna, the thunder of the Government's artillery still in our ears, downtrodden and bewildered, there was one thing which we Austrian Socialists knew for certain: that this victory would not last, that these usurpers, triumphant now, would not enjoy the spoils of their victory for long.

They had greedily seized upon the opportunity, offered by Hitler's ruthless extermination of the Labour movement in neighbouring Germany, to crush the Austrian working-class, to establish their own Fascism, the class rule of the large-scale capitalists and big landlords.

They excused their betrayal of the sworn constitution and the destruction of all liberties as a necessity for preserving Austria's independence against Hitler's menacing aspirations. We knew from the beginning that the unloosing of the Fascist spirit in our country, the suppression of all anti-Fascist forces could only lead to the small and weak Austro-Fascism being devoured by its huge and powerful German counterpart.

Five months later, Dollfuss, the creator and leader of Austro-Fascism, was murdered by the agents of German Fascism. Four years later his system itself is receiving its deathblow by the leaders of German Fascism.

There is, however, no cause for rejoicing on our part. Our unfortunate country, after four years of bitter and by no means entirely unsuccessful struggle against the petty tyrannies of Austro-Fascism, passes into the very hell of Nazi-Fascism.

Our strong and virile underground workers' movement, which steadily grew in spite of all persecution, will now have to face an infinitely more accomplished despotism.

Unbounded human misery for my friends and comrades in Austria will arise from the changes going on now in that country.

But there are much wider aspects. The fateful happenings in Austria do not concern Austria alone.

Let us first consider what has happened. By blackmail, unique in modern history for its blunt directness, Hitler was forced into complete surrender to Hitler's demands. The ominous "Anschluss," the incorporation of Austria into Germany, is, if not yet an accomplished fact, a foregone conclusion.

France and Great Britain did all in their power to prevent this "Anschluss" from the time of the peace treaties up to the now forgotten days of the abortive "Customs Union" between the two countries in 1931.

They prevented a union which at that time was genuinely desired by both peoples—they will tolerate now an annexation which is dreaded by the great majority of the Austrian people and will assist in cementing the detested Nazi domination over the German people.

A NEW OUTLOOK

There is still much loose thinking over here in this connection. Some Socialist and pacifist circles, remembering their rightful indignation over the stifling of the once popular demand for the "Anschluss," even feel a kind of satisfaction in seeing this "Anschluss" realised in the end.

But times have changed—conditions, unfortunately, have changed completely—our outlook, too, must change if we want to understand the realities of this fascist-ridden world.

Immediately after the war the peaceful peoples of two democratic republics wanted to join forces in order to heal the wounds of war and defeat in common Socialist reconstruction. It was criminal arrogance to hinder it.

To-day a scheming dictator bullies a small neighbouring country into submission.

It is criminal cowardice to allow it, and the old crime is by no means atoned for by adding a new one!

THE TOWN CRIER

ous, even now more or less Nazi-fied countries, will be under Nazi domination.

Hitler, then master of half Europe, will proceed to the West: he will blackmail France into surrendering Alsace and Lorraine; he will blackmail Great Britain into surrendering her colonies; he will, just as he is blackmailing Austria now, Flanders? Moonshine? Well, five years ago anyone predicting a stage of world as we have it to-day, would have been sneered at as a fatal pessimist who wanted to make our flesh creep.

And is it feasible that anywhere in Europe democracy could survive under the shadow of such a stage? and triumphant Fascist empire? That anywhere in the world anti-dependent working-class movements could strive peacefully to attain Socialism while Hitler and Mussolini spread their gospel of despotism and exploitation?

These, of course, are the wider implications of the Austrian tragedy. If the Western democracies on the one hand, Russia on the other, continue to watch it as more or less interested spectators (as they watched Fascist aggression in Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain and China), eventually they won't avoid being drawn into the ghastly tragedy of world war, which firm and concerted action still might prevent.

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"EQUALITY"

A new edition of Professor R. H. Tawney's book "Equality" is being published by the Workers' Educational Association at the end of February at the reduced price of 2s. 6d. post free.

The book, which was warmly welcomed by progressive movements, is of particular importance in view of political developments in Europe within the last few years.

Letter showing Austria considered a backwater, 1935 Sent from the from the League for Industrial Democracy in New York, June 1935. Note the reference to Hans knowing Jennie Lee, Aneurin Bevan's wife.

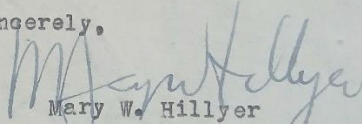
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London, N.Y.
England

Dear Dr. Hirsch;

I am more than sorry that it is necessary for me to return to you your manuscripts on the Austrian movement. I have shown your articles to several possible editors here in the United States but they feel that the situation at the moment in Austria is not of as great world importance as that in other parts of Europe and consequently because of the limitation of space cannot use your work. Should anything new develop in Austria I think there is unquestionably a possibility that an article could be used. It is however true, that most of the liberal and radical press in America have correspondents in the various countries that have been supplying them with material and information.

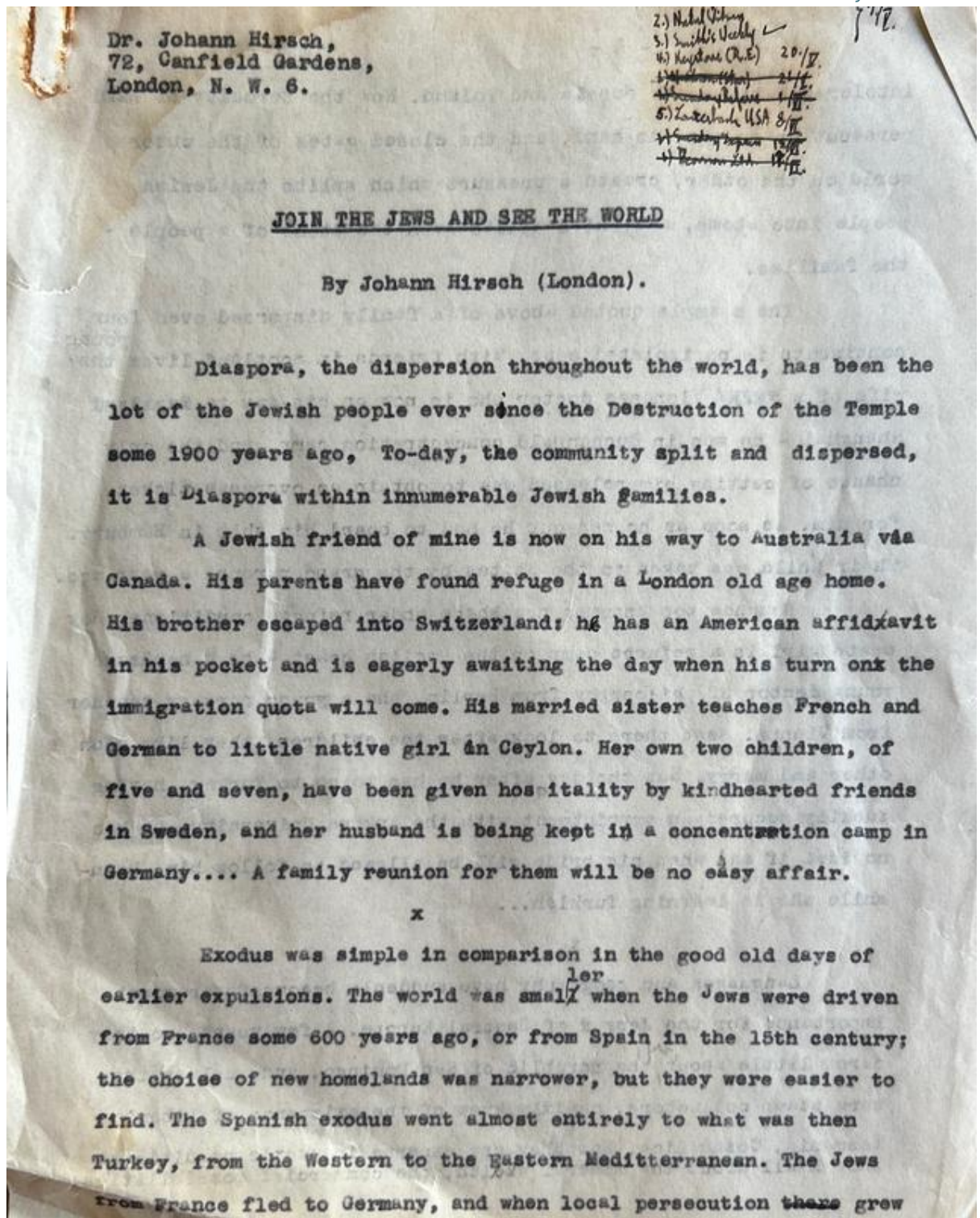
I am particularly sorry that I cannot be more helpful both because you are an emigre and a friend of Jennie Lee's.

Sincerely,

Mary W. Hillyer

mwh:hr

The modern diaspora, 1939 – a powerful article about why Jewish refugees' experience is different from previous diasporas. Note at the end who he sent it to (apparently unsuccessfully) to try to get it published!

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intolerable there, to Russia and Poland. Now the ferocity of Nazi persecution on the one hand, and the closed gates of the outer world on the other, create a pressure which splits the Jewish people into atoms, and which splits even the atoms of a people - the families.

The example quoted above of a family dispersed over four continents is no isolated case. With friends in Scotland lives the ^{young} wife of a ~~young~~ Viennese doctor who is now on his way to ~~Shanghai~~ Shanghai - he was in Buchenwald concentration camp, and the only chance of getting him released was to obtain an overseas ticket for him. As soon as he was out he had to board his ship in Hamburg. Their child was taken to the States by the grand parents a year ago.

Romance too assumes new shape under refugee conditions. Boy meets girl in a refugee camp on the English coast - he a handsome young doctor of philosophy from Berlin, she a young nursery teacher from Vienna. Sent there to look after the children, they like each other and marry. But the day after he has to go to Turkey, having luckily secured an appointment with the Ankara University. He has no idea if and when his bride will be allowed to follow him. Meanwhile she is learning Turkish...

X

Languages and geography have suddenly become of paramount importance for the Jews of Central Europe. A few years ago they cared little about the Republic of San Domingo, and, unless they were stamp collectors, hardly knew of the existence of Liberia, Tasmania, Costa Rica. Now they are experts in exotic conditions, know all about the mineral wealth, the commercial possibilities,

and above all the immigration regulations of the most remote countries. The very word 'remote' has lost its meaning for them.

Two Jews, their papers ready for emigration after untold agonies, met at the station in Vienna. "Where are you going?", asked one of them. "To Bolivia." "To Bolivia? As far as that?" "Far from where?" answered the second.

So they drift into the world. The young ones like it. Their daydreams come true when they find themselves on their way in reality to those romantic lands which were, one or two years ago, only known as the scene of exciting adventures in books and magazines. There is a boy of seventeen in London now whose parents managed to get ~~their~~ permit for Austrakia. He can hardly wait for the day when their ship is due to sail. Before they came to London he had never left the small town in Moravia where his family lived for many generations - and now he is going to see the glories of the Mediterranean, the marvels of the East, and finally to land in the Antipodes. It's grand - and he feels almost like shouting: "Heil Hitler! Thanks to our Fuehrer!"

X

But for the older generation it is no fun. Will they be able once more to establish themselves in this great world? ~~THEIR~~ theirs was ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ For half a lifetime/a small world of business friends and family relations, of visits to coffee-houses and outings on Sundays - an unpretentious world, but one in which they knew their standing, their own modest but seemingly sure place in the scheme of things. Will they be able to adapt themselves to entirely new and foreign conditions, new language, new food, new customs?

And these are the anxieties of the lucky few, the elect

who through family connections, through special abilities, or by some stroke of luck, secured themselves a place to go to. They are the object of fervid envy by the vast majority of would-be emigrants, who find there is no room in the whole wide world for them.

x

There is the mighty ocean, but no welcoming shore. Ships, not always too seaworthy, are crossing the seas loaded with refugees whom they cannot disembark. ^{1. The 'Pleasure Cruise to the West Indies' of a few thousand of them has recently captured the attention of the world. But this equally exciting adventure of other ships and their tragic cargo have rarely, if ever, reached the public.}
(A few weeks ^{ago}) the Nazis in Danzig shepherded 500 Jews into a freighter, which sailed under no flag and whose name had been painted over. The Jews had no visas in their Danzig passports, but the great red J which assured them of the greatest possible difficulty in landing. The mystery ship has not been heard of since. Whether she went aground, or whether, a Flying Dutchman of our time, she is still plying the ocean - who knows?

Another small steamer, sailing from Rumania under the Panama flag with 780 German refugees aboard, was caught by a heavy storm in the Black Sea and drifted helplessly for days until Greek fishing vessels rescued the passengers.

Yet another bunch of refugees secured a visas for Uruguay and crossed the Atlantic from Le Havre. On their arrival in South America some fault was found ^{with} in their visas and they were sent back to France. In the meantime the fault was rectified, and with their last money they had to book new tickets and are crossing the Atlantic for the third time. Whether they will be admitted now is not yet known.

x

The story is told of a Jew who asked at a travel agency which country he could emigrate to. The agent showed him a globe.

For a long time the Jew stood before the globe, turning it round and round and looking at the multicoloured countries, which asked for landing money he could not afford, for certificates he could not provide, conditions he could not comply with. Finally he turned to the agent and said: "Haven't you got something better in stock?..."

Unfortunately he and his fellows have to take the globe as they find it, locked and barred, and to look for loopholes. Shanghai, for a time at least, proved such a loophole. 3-4000 refugees from Germany have already gone there and more are on their way. There are comparatively few restrictions on access to the International Concession, and immigrants are allowed to work. But how they will make their living remains a mystery. They cannot yet compete with the Chinese kulis who regard 18 Shanghai dollars (roughly 3 USA dollars) a month a princely income while European workers can hardly subsist on eight times that sum. About 20,000 White Russians have found refuge in Shanghai too, and though it is close on twenty years since they flocked into that Far Eastern city, the majority of them are by no means settled yet. Many still waver on the brink of crime, destitution, prostitution. But there is no Gestapo, and that is enough to make Jews from Hitlerland jubilant over their Shanghai visas.

They starve in the Far East, they starve in the Wild West. A doctor got stranded in Panama, with his wife and two small children. He is not allowed to practise or to take on any other work, and there is no Jewish community to support him. He plans now to hitch-hike through the South American wilderness (Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia - as far as from one end of Europe to the other) and to

smuggle himself through a backdoor into Argentine. Her front door is firmly bolted to ^{the} have-nots.

Without a golden key there is no access to the wide open spaces. There are, however, differences in the amount of money the different countries require the immigrant to bring with him. Some British colonies ask only for the moderate deposit of £30-50, which, moreover, is returned after a certain period.

But to this must be added the cost ~~amxxxatiffx~~ of getting a visa, the cost of the ship's ticket; and all kinds of commission, of course, to be paid to the people who come into this business as genuine, or more often spurious, helpers.

Travel agencies in Germany have been doing a roaring trade. It's not only the tickets they provide (and here the difficulty is that only a very limited number is sold for German marks by the shipping companies), but visas too, passports and all sorts of certificates needed, partly for the exit from Hitlerland, partly for entry into their future home. Most of the South American States for instance confine immigration to Roman Catholics; There is at least one tourist agency in Berlin which for an additional fee delivers the necessary document together with the rest of the travel papers. Pricelists for visas and tickets ~~fr~~ vary from day to day. A racket exists for obtaining visas to every country on earth. They fetch fantastic prices, and, more often than not, are ~~they~~ afterwards discovered to be faked. A host of shady individuals preys on the would-be (or - must-be) emigrants, pretending to get them round the innumerable difficulties which block their way, and actually skinning them to the bone.

It is an extremely slow, extremely painful, completely unorganised business, this exodus of harassed Jews from Hitler's Central Europe, stripped of all their belongings, untrained for their new life. They leave their parents behind, and sometimes even their children, they take with them a few ~~personal~~ ^{few} personal belongings and - the memories of a happy childhood, of proud achievements perhaps, ^(maybe) of a cultured home ~~which~~ which was theirs.

A pathetic saying current among them sentimentalizes their fate: Parents become photographs, children become letters, fortunes become tax-receipts, happy homes become battered luggage... So they face the Wide World.

P.S. I would not object, of course, to a cutting down of the article.

Yours sincerely,

With kind regards,

I should be very grateful to have the MS back as soon as possible. If the article is not suitable, however, enough to submit it to the appropriate quarters? If you think so too, would you be good enough to let me know. I hope you don't mind my approaching you again. I wrote the enclosed article and thought it might be suitable for the R.S.

Dear Mr. Foot,

Mr. Michael Foot,
The Evening Standard,
46 - 47, Shoe Lane,
E. C. 4.

May 9th, 1939.

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*"Red Taper", civil service magazine
Feb 1940*

SOCIALISTS AND THE WAR

A CONTINENTAL SOCIALIST'S VIEW OF THE ISSUES INVOLVED

By Dr. JOHANN HIRSCH

THE first victim of the Second World War has been the ardent faith of the international working class in the Socialist promise of Soviet Russia. The Stalin-Hitler pact killed it, the share-out of Poland buried it, the rape of Finland destroyed the last hope of resurrection.

Even the most blindly devoted must now, if they dare open their eyes, behold the utter collapse of their great illusion: the Russian revolution never did succeed. For the success of a Socialist revolution is solely to be judged by the fact, whether or not it leads to the establishment of a Socialist order. And this attempt has most definitely failed in Russia.

SUPERHUMAN EFFORT.

It was bound to fail, in spite of all superhuman efforts to create in the shortest possible time the basis for a Socialist society. Just these overstrained efforts, rigidly fixed to that one aim, had from the very beginning to disregard essential principles of Socialist conduct, and gave the Bolshevik way towards Socialism from the start barbaric and despotic features, totally alien to the spirit of Socialism.

Up to very recently one thing was commonly agreed in Socialist circles everywhere: the defence of the Soviet Union in any future war. Now that Soviet Russia has turned aggressor, this formula has lost its meaning. Now that her high-flung Socialist ambitions have been superseded by crude Imperialist aspirations, her attitude can no longer give a lead to Socialists. To determine the Socialist outlook it will be necessary to come down to the essentials of the present conflagration.

Many single issues, of course, are involved. But they are all embraced by one broad general issue: Western Civilisation, as gradually evolved since the Middle Ages, versus Barbaric State Despotism in its new, totalitarian, form, adapted to the technical and economic needs of this age.

Western Civilisation is a most complex product, composed of many heterogeneous elements. It includes modern Capitalism and "classic" Imperialism, political Democracy, the Rights of Man, certain rules of conduct

between individuals as well as nations. It also comprises—and this is what we are primarily concerned with—the independent Labour Movement. Socialism, as we understood it, is in fact the spiritual offspring of Western civilisation, has been based on its achievements, was only to materialise within its framework. True, this notion of Socialism had become somewhat blurred under the spell of the Russian revolution. Now, however, when cruel disillusion has come, our original conception of Socialism as an order not only of economic quality but at the same time of unfettered individual and political liberty based on free self-determination, must be reasserted in no ambiguous terms. That dictatorial, dogmatic conception, which under the name of "Communism" invaded the brains of millions of workers after the war, has led to red-painted State despotism in the end.

THE DANGER OF FASCISM

It is thus our own cause which we defend when we take sides in this war and help to save Western civilisation from annihilation. Victorious Fascism would not only exterminate all existing democratic achievements—apt to be underrated only by those who have never lived under Fascism or, for that matter, under Bolshevism—it would also radically destroy all chances of Socialism for generations.

If, on the other hand, the war leads to the downfall of Hitlerism and all it stands for, then indeed we may still see the dawn of Socialism in our generation. Not that we should be able just to pluck it as an easy fruit of victory; it will certainly require the most strenuous and the most resourceful efforts of the Socialist parties all over the world to achieve it. There is, however, this broad hope: that the common people of all lands, after they have gone through this war, will no longer tolerate an order of society which bred two world wars in one generation. They will not tolerate it—if their voice is left unstifled; if they are not gagged and chained by victorious despotism.

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After Hitler—What ?

By Johann Hirsch

REPORTS from Germany, differing in many a detail, agree on one point: the uncertainty about what might succeed the Nazi régime is one of its strongest safeguards. The German people, without any tangible alternative to Hitler, continue their already shattered allegiance to the Fuehrer by default.

For, what will, what might come after ? Anarchy ? Monarchy ? Bolshevism ? Defeat and humiliation ? Military occupation, dismemberment and foreign generals in place of native oppressors ? Present life in Germany, no doubt, is hard and bitter—but the future holds no hope strong and bright enough to be worth fighting for. So, in a state of gloomy apathy, the average German goes on as he is told by the Nazi bosses.

Three Courses

Three main prospects of how the Nazi régime could be removed in the course of the war can be envisaged.

The first is the conception of a "palace conspiracy" accompanied by a military coup with the object to replace Hitler by either some less compromised and more compromising Nazi leader (Goering being the favourite), or else by a representative of Big Business, like Thyssen or Schacht, or by one of the army leaders.

The second is the transformation, engineered by the radical wing of the Nazi Party, of the existing National "Socialism" into outright National Bolshevism after the Stalin model.

Lastly: a popular revolution against the régime and its machinery of suppression. Let us consider briefly the chances and the probable results of these three possibilities.

The Generals all Over Again ?

Most cherished in official quarters, both here and in France, is still, in spite of many disappointments, the first one. It would, they imagine, achieve the ousting of the Nazi régime with the least social upheaval. It would evolve an "honourable" dictatorship, military or otherwise, dependent on Western support and later on to be stabilised, and perhaps even democratised, under the crown of the Hohenzollerns or some other puppet dynasty.

Unfortunately, or fortunately if we take a longer view, the chances of a development along these lines do not appear to be great. The recurrent reports of a generals' opposition to the Nazi leadership as well as those about a powerful monarchist movement in Germany are highly exaggerated, to say the least. The officer class would only turn against the Nazis if they had reason to think that the general hatred accumulated against Nazism was to become adverse to the war effort. Then, the military leaders might try to assume control—not, however, in order to make

peace with the democracies, but to rally the people behind themselves in a desperate last effort to win the war!

And even assuming that, with the hope of victory irretrievably lost this time, they were to approach the Western Powers as the "peace party," their régime supported by the industrialists and the Junker class, would simply restore the Second German Reich—that Germany of 1914 whose imperialist aspirations resulted in the Great War. Not the ambitions of a single man, of the Kaiser in 1914 and of Hitler now, and far less some mysterious aggressiveness in the German national character caused the two world wars of this century: it was the expansionist tendency of the dominating social forces in Germany—of the militaristic officer corps; of the land-owning Junker class; of the coal barons, the steel magnates, the armament kings. These social forces stood behind the Kaiser—the same social forces reared Hitler. Given a new lease of life, they would soon reproduce the conditions for a new attempt at German world domination. A retrograde liquidation of the Nazi régime would, therefore, even if it were practicable, in no way meet the true national interests of Britain and France, far less the international interests of peace, freedom and security.

It might be argued that safeguards far stronger than those imposed at Versailles could prevent next time a resurrection of Germany's aggressiveness, regardless of her internal régime. This, however, would imply a political and economic subjugation of Germany which could only result in most desolate internal conditions, conditions which, in the face of all safeguards, would inevitably lead to a popular revolution; and the social forces hereby released would turn with equal vigour against the reactionary domestic régime imposed on them as against their foreign overlords. They might then bring about that violent, anti-Western, anti-democratic régime of National Bolshevism which as an immediate outcome has become rather improbable now.

National Bolshevism ?

It was discussed as a serious possibility for a time following the outbreak of war and the conclusion of the Stalin-Hitler pact. The assimilation of the two systems, of Hitler's Nazism and Stalin's Bolshevism, had already gone far—not only in their similar totalitarian technique of political control, but in their economic structure as well. Now, with the *rapprochement* of the two hitherto hostile governments, a close amalgamation appeared to be on the cards, and with Russia in the ascendancy it was likely to take the form of Germany's Bolshevisation, or rather Stalinisation.

Stalin's Finnish adventure and his consequent loss of prestige changed the picture. The adoption of Bolshevik methods appears no longer desirable to

the "radical" section of the Nazis, who, for a time, had hoped that it would help to rouse the masses to a passionate drive in a "holy" anti-capitalist war.

As to the masses themselves, however, their hope that Bolshevik Russia would deliver them from the Nazi yoke was lost when Stalin became friends with their oppressors. As things stand now, a Bolshevisation of Germany after the Stalin model would mean for them hardly anything else but the replacing of the Gestapo by the G.P.U. It would bring them neither bread, nor peace, nor freedom—their lot would remain practically unaffected by the alterations in the totalitarian superstructure.

Socialist Germany

After years of tyrannical oppression, of constant interference with their private lives, of unchecked exploitation, of untold hardships and privations, of perpetual stress and strain, of feverish war preparation culminating in a hopeless war, the German people, and foremost the German workers, want above all to live in peace and to be left in peace; to be free to live their own lives, to think for themselves, to speak as they like, to read what they like; to build up their organisations, to organise their community to their own benefit; to work and to produce for their own needs.

They realise that to this end they must, as the very first preliminary, rid themselves of the Nazi régime. But neither a Stalinist nor a capitalist Germany will give them what they want. Exploitation would continue and in the impoverished state of the country after the war their lots would hardly be mitigated if the fruits of their labour were then to be directed to the accumulation of private profits instead of to the greed of an insatiable war machinery. Only a Socialist reconstruction of Germany can possibly satisfy the needs of her people.

Under the Nazi rule German economy has already become highly organised and highly centralised. To revert this process in the direction of orthodox private capitalism would be a fatal and a most dangerous error. Progressive development in Germany will, necessarily, switch over the existing powerful economic machinery from working for war and destruction to creating prosperity and plenty. It will have, further, to execute the legal dispossession of the heavy industrialists and of the Junkers, i.e. of those disturbing social elements who would certainly thwart, by their material power, the peaceful evolution of German democracy, as experienced after 1918; if left untouched again, they would breed another Hitler within another generation.

After the Nazi Régime

It is of paramount interest to the international labour movement, and to world democracy in general, that this process of laying the foundations of Socialism after the downfall of the Nazi régime, should go unchecked by outside interference, either from the capitalist West or from the Stalinist East, whether by military or by economic attempts. It should, on the contrary, receive every possible assistance from the

Socialist and democratic forces all over the world. If a clear-cut and vivid picture of this peaceful and democratic Socialist Germany could be presented to the German people now, it would provide the missing alternative to the Hitler régime. It would give the German masses the strongest incentive to rise against their oppressors.

Of course, the formidable machinery of Nazi suppression must first be weakened by formidable military blows before a general rising in Germany becomes feasible. Many people in this country, who at the outbreak of war had hoped for an early revolution against Hitler, without clearly realising what revolution in a totalitarian country implies, are now, in their disappointment, apt to blame all Germans for aiding and abetting Hitler's crimes by obeying his orders. In consequence the dangerous attempt is made to shift the war guilt from Hitler and his gang to the whole of the German nation. This rash judgment leaves out of account the well-nigh irresistible internal power of Nazism. And it is as unwise as it is unjust: if generally accepted, it would only delay the revolution in Germany, and thereby prolong the war. On the other hand, this revolution would be certainly accelerated, if the German people had a reasonable prospect not only of a just peace, but also of achieving Socialism by incurring the heavy risks and terrible sacrifices inevitably involved in a revolution against the most ruthless tyranny of all times.

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Dora Gaitskell letter, 1963 Bettina – who had written to her after Hugh Gaitskell died suddenly, sharing perspectives from her own early loss of her husband.

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18 Regent Gardens London N.W. 3
Feb 28th.
My dear Bettina – thank you for your
kind letter and I hope you will
understand and forgive my not
answering it sooner. Yes you have
been through it all and your
good active life gives me hope
when the waves of despair break
inside me. Even though he is
dead I feel so sorry for Hugh!
He worked so hard – too hard –
and just missed his goal.
I had begged him to spare
himself for a long time – but
he did not listen. I found
he had kept all my letters
I had written to him before we
were married and all the
ones I sent to Vienna in 1934!
Perhaps one day I shall visit

Vienna again. If you happen to come to
London do come and see me.
Thank you for writing. Hugh has
certainly left a large legacy of
friends
With the warmest wishes to you.
Yours ever.
Dora.

First fold here →

Sender's name and address: Mrs. Hugo Cairns
18 Finsbury Gardens
London N. 10. 3.

AN AIR LETTER SHOULD NOT CONTAIN ANY
ENCLOSURE; IF IT DOES IT WILL BE SURCHARGED
OR SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL.

Second fold here →

BY AIR MAIL
PAID AVON
AIR LETTER
AEROGRAMME

15 JUN 1959

SIXPENCE-POSTAGE

Mrs. Bettina Hirsch
Notlast Lane 64
Wien 13

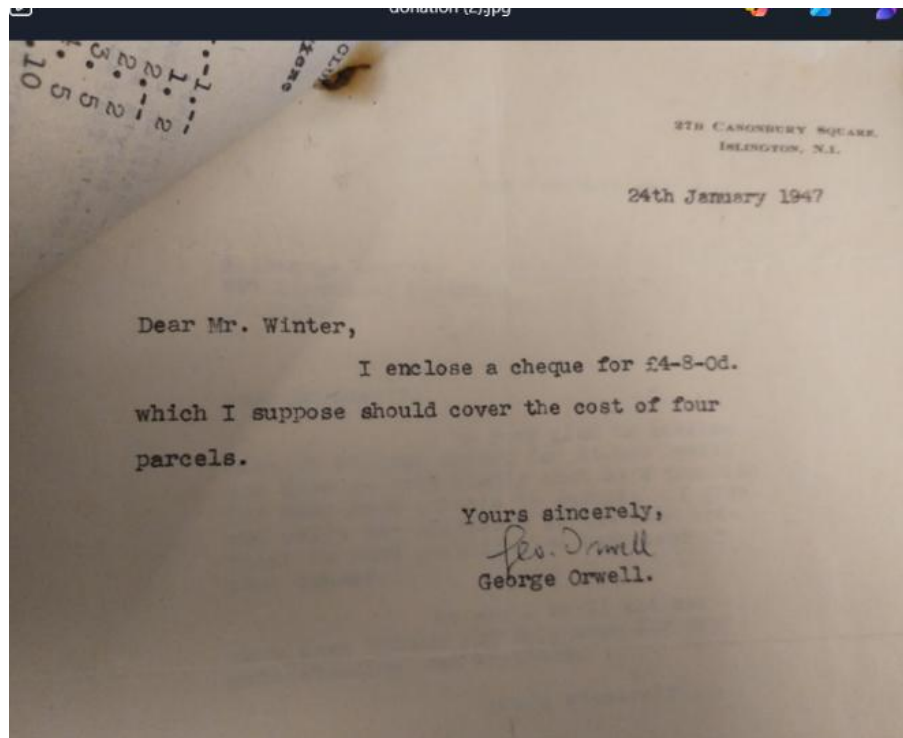
Austrian Vienna

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Orwellian letter, 1947

This letter turned up in Bettina's papers, mixed among correspondence about a fund that she was keeping records of people from the London Labour Party offering to pay for food parcels to help Austrian socialist party members in hardship during the dire conditions in occupied Vienna after the end of the war.

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Link to further documents

For further interest, Tim has put together an [archive of many additional scanned documents relating to Hans](#), organized chronologically by Adam from papers in Anni's attic. They are in a mixture of German and English, and include a combination of correspondence with various contacts in the Austrian Social Democrat movement, and evidence of the intensive lobbying led by Hans as co-convenor of the party in London. Many are quite difficult to interpret (the associated narrative attempts to do so), but we are preserving this archive as a potentially important resource for historians of the period, as well as for the family.