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The Austrian Heimwehr

Ludwig Jedlicka

The years of authoritarian rule in Austria ushered in by the Chancellor Dr Dollfuss and the Heimwehr movement in 1933, and continuing after the Chancellor's murder at the hands of national-socialists by the government of Dr Kurt Schuschnigg, are sometimes described as a period of fascism or clerical-fascism. The term 'clerical-fascism', however, hardly stands up to scrutiny, for the system in question consisted of a mixture of the most varied right-wing ideas, ideologies, and tendencies which had been trying to make headway in Austrian home affairs since 1920 and which, by the middle twenties, had taken shape within the so-called Heimwehr movement. The term 'clerico-fascism' appears in Charles A. Gulick's *Austria from the Habsburgs to Hitler* (German ed., Vienna, 1948). The German historian Ulrich Eichstädt wrote that after the events of March 1933 Austria ceased to exist as a democracy and took the path towards Austro-fascism.¹ Ernst Nolte, in his comprehensive survey of the history of fascist thought, comes to the conclusion that Austrian 'Heimwehr-fascism' succeeded in putting the state on a new basis, but was not identical with the 'Austro-fascism' which had superseded the parliamentary system of government. In evaluating the personalities who dominated the Austrian scene from 1933 to 1938, he suggests that Prince Starhemberg, the leader of the Heimwehr for many years, was probably more of a fascist than an aristocrat, but that the same cannot be said of either Dollfuss or Schuschnigg.² Given these differing views about Austrian fascism, about its origins and its effect on political events, the present study will be confined to the Heimwehr, that is, to the movement which is still regarded as the sole repository of authoritarian and fascist thought in recent Austrian history. It is unfortunate that of the existing studies of this movement there are only a few which can be called scholarly.

¹ Ulrich Eichstädt: *Von Dollfuss zu Hitler* (Wiesbaden, 1955), p. 17.

² Ernst Nolte: *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (Munich, 1963), p. 41.

The Austrian historian Adam Wandruszka deals with the Heimwehr in his admirable essay on the political structure of Austria, but he was unable to consult sources which have since come to light.³ Three studies breaking new ground have been made by members of the younger generation of Austrian historians. They deal with the ideological history of the Heimwehr and its precursors, as well as with the 'Fatherland Front' which was in some ways its successor.⁴ A Hungarian, Dr L. Kerekes, has made a study of the Heimwehr that is of special importance for the light it casts on the support which that movement received from Italy.⁵ His work is based mainly on material in the Hungarian state archives.

The Austrian Heimwehr movement came into being during the winter and spring of 1918-19. In the rural districts of Austria voluntary defence units were formed as guards for homes, farms and railways. They were fitted out with weapons of the former imperial army and acted in support of the as yet feeble state administration set up at the end of the war. Similarly, so-called workers and factory guards were formed in the towns, which, unlike the more conservative country districts, were for the most part controlled by the social-democrats. These organizations were thus from the very start divided into adherents either of the Right or the Left. Both were issued with arms by the Austrian government, and these were never called in.⁶ When in 1919 the Allied Commission demanded the surrender of weapons, these

³ Adam Wandruszka, 'Österreichs politische Struktur', in: *Geschichte der Republik Österreich* (Vienna, 1954).

⁴ F. Schweiger: *Geschichte der niederösterreichischen Heimwehr von 1928-1930*, phil. Dissertation (Vienna, 1965); Irmgard Bärnthaler: *Geschichte und Organisation der Vaterländischen Front*, phil. Dissertation (Vienna, 1964); Ingeborg Messerer: *Die Frontkämpferversammlung Deutsch-Österreichs* (Vienna, 1963).

⁵ Lajos Kerekes: 'Italien, Ungarn und die Österreichische Heimwehrbewegung 1928-1931' in: *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* (Vienna, 9 Jg. F. 1, January 1965).

⁶ The political significance of the *Bauernwehren* and *Heimwehren* in the event of a left landslide is brought out in a report of 8 July 1919, by the British military attaché, Colonel Cunningham, *Documents of British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, First Series, vol. VI, no. 22, p. 37 ff. An official report dated 30 November 1918 (*Österreichisches Kriegsarchiv, Waffenstillstand und Interall. 1919-21* B.M.f. Heerwesen, Sektion 2), gives the following figures for weapons issued to the various defence units: 1156 machine guns, 80,345 repeating rifles, 13,627 carbines, 3967 hand grenades, 888 side-arms, 8,702,640 rifle cartridges, 72,891 pistol cartridges. The treaty of St Germain limited the size of the army to 30,000, to which can be added 10,000 police troops, armed only in part with rifles. This indicates roughly the number of weapons remaining in the hands of the civilian population.

considerable stocks found their way into the various secret depots of the defence units and also played their part in a short interlude of frontier warfare. In Carinthia large sections of the population were determined to take up arms against the encircled Yugoslavs. The fighting which followed showed the voluntary organizations, which since the spring of 1919 had borne the name of *Heimatschutz*, fighting shoulder to shoulder with detachments of the regular army. The sequel to the use of these voluntary formations was the first big expansion of the Heimwehr. It developed into a paramilitary organization for the defence of Austria against foreign enemies, but also against 'marxism' as the foe within, and this, in its turn, led to significant political, military and ideological relationships with similar movements in Germany.

Contacts with German formations were made via the Tyrol and Upper Austria. In 1919 and 1920, citizen defence units sprang up in Upper Austria, organized in the main by members of the landed gentry and the lower middle classes to deal with disturbances created by the workers in the industrial districts of Linz and Steyer. Similar developments took place in the Tyrol, where there was fear of an Italian invasion. The initiator here was the Christian-Social politician and lawyer Dr Richard Steidle, a native of South Tyrol, who was to become the most extreme supporter of fascist ideology within the Heimwehr movement. At first, however, it was from Bavaria that the groups in the Tyrol, Upper Austria, and Carinthia were most strongly influenced. The Bavarian defence unit set up by Dr Escherich, which has come down to history under the name of 'Orgesch', became the patron and arms supplier of the Tyrolean and Upper Austrian formations. After the collapse of the Kapp *putsch* in Berlin in 1920, one of its leading participants, Waldemar Pabst, a Prussian and former major on the General Staff, came to the Tyrol and there took up Austrian citizenship under a false name. Soon, as their chief-of-staff, he became the organizational driving force behind the Austrian Heimwehr, and attracted the attention of those, particularly in Bavaria, who were interested in the possibility of getting reinforcements in the event of a general show-down with marxist opponents in Germany and Austria.

The Heimwehr and its backers in Austria directly or indirectly supported every radical movement emanating from Munich. Contact with Hitler was maintained between 1920 and 1923, and

although there were no ideological ties between Heimwehr and national-socialism, numbers of the *putschists* of 9 November 1923, among them Goering, found refuge in the Tyrol.⁷ In view of the relative stability of conditions in Austria between 1924 and 1926, these developments were of negligible ideological importance, but it is interesting to note that in Upper Austria it was the emergence of Prince Starhemberg which built the first bridge between the Heimwehr and the political parties. Princess Fanny Starhemberg, a prominent representative of the christian-social outlook, was the intermediary between the Heimwehr and Hauser, a church dignitary and the governor of Upper Austria. He declared his readiness to have discussions with the leaders of the Heimwehr, particularly with Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, the princess's son. This was the beginning of the steadily growing support given to the Heimwehr by the leading bourgeois political party in Austria. Documents recently unearthed in the Hungarian archives show that even at this early stage an intense interest in the Heimwehr was awakening in Hungary and Italy, and among the most influential bourgeois politicians in Vienna.

Much clearer-cut in its ideology was the organization emerging in the eastern districts of Austria, above all in Vienna. Here was the most powerful group of military and semi-military organizations, the Frontkämpfer Association of German-Austria. This had been founded by Colonel Hermann Hiltl, formerly on the Staff of the imperial army. He had at first intended it merely as an association to foster comradeship among ex-soldiers. Soon, however, the association developed into an aggressive political force of a paramilitary type, and on 20 May 1920 it published as its programme a four-point declaration of principle:

1. The Frontkämpfer Association is a completely autonomous and independent organization.
2. Its guiding principle is: 'The general good must be placed before petty party politics.'
3. It is aryan in character, stands outside party politics, and has no

⁷ For the early history of the Heimwehr movement see the official publication: *Heimatschutz in Österreich* (2nd ed., Vienna, 1935), and Hans Arthofer: *1918-1936. Vom Selbstschutz zur Frontmiliz* (Vienna, 1936).

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truck with international, subversive elements such as social-democrats and communists.

4. Its ideal is the unification of the entire German *Volk*.⁸

The Frontkämpfer soon acquired para-military features. Field-days, tactical exercises, alerts during strikes and demonstrations, offers of support to the administration, feelers put out to the army on every conceivable occasion, these were the hallmarks of a development which at first prevented the Heimwehr from making headway in Vienna, Lower Austria, and the Burgenland. Nevertheless, the Association adhered to its radical programme. At a conference in 1926 it adopted a number of principles which amounted in substance to opposition to the marxist ideology, the demand for a reduction in the number of seats in the national and regional legislatures, for a strengthening of the powers of the president, and for a change in the electoral law (this last, interestingly enough, mooted the idea of corporate representation).⁹

Although, at a lecture given in Vienna on 8 March 1926 on 'Fascism and Frontkämpfer Association', Colonel Hiltl refused to have his organization put on a par with fascism, giving as his main reason the behaviour of the fascists in South Tyrol, the ideological development of the Association continued to be marked by its obvious borrowings of fascist ideas. The concept of strong leadership was advanced more and more forcefully:

Iron nerves and self-confidence undreamed of by the average man are the hallmarks of the true leader, who in the terrible loneliness of the strong is ready to oppose a whole world of hostile forces. Since the *Volk* is no longer a spiritual entity, every leader needs a minority on whom he can rely. These men, moulded by his will and welded together in spirit and purpose, will exercise the kind of authority which . . . unites the soul of a nation. This minority must be supported by the traditions of the fatherland, must look backwards to the heroes of the *Volk*, and must draw its strength from the great past of its *Volk* and its native land.¹⁰

The formation of an elite which was to mould the 'new state' was another question taken in hand – at any rate theoretically – at an

⁸ Oberst Hiltl: *Ein Gedenkbuch* (Vienna, 1931), p. 79 ff.

⁹ Reproduced in *Die neue Front* (Journal of the Frontkämpfer Association), 1 June 1933.

¹⁰ I. Messerer, *op. cit.*, p. 119 ff. (from the report of a participant at the conference in 1926).

early date. Not only did the Association engage actively in *Wehrsport*, but secret courses were also instituted to train a group of young people to become the 'iron kernel' of the organization. In these exercises, the instruction sheets of which have been preserved, there are unmistakable suggestions of the ideology of the SS of the future. An instruction sheet of the so-called 'iron kernel' declares:

The Iron Kernel is the heart of the Frontkämpfer Association, the centre from which the power streams out that permeates the whole organization. The Iron Kernel is the lever of the highest leader, his secret right hand, his support. The leader is the head, the Iron Kernel the heart of the Association. The Iron Kernel does not itself lead; it is the executive organ of the leader and carries out every service that is necessary in the interests of the Association. The Iron Kernel is the soul of the organization – a soul imbued with the spirit and will of the leader.

'Iron' signifies hard, unbreakable, firm. A sword is made of iron! The Iron Kernel is the leader's sword. 'Kernel' means that which is inmost, the invisible, the steadfast centre. From this is derived the concept Iron Kernel.¹¹

The ideology of the corporate state, which the Heimwehr later took over from Italy and propagated so intensively, had already been proclaimed by the Frontkämpfer Association before 1927. It is therefore no coincidence that the first serious internal upheaval of the young republic of Austria came about through an affray between the Association and the Social-Democratic party. In January 1927, in the little town of Schattendorf in the Burgenland, there were violent clashes between Frontkämpfer and members of the social-democratic defence union, the Schutzbund, resulting in a number of dead and severely injured among the adherents of the Left. On 15 July 1927, in a trial by jury held in an atmosphere of high political tension, the accused Frontkämpfer were acquitted. A day later fighting broke out in Vienna, the law-courts were burned down, and the police attacks on the demonstrators caused almost a hundred deaths and even more severe casualties. The wound inflicted on the young republic was not healed. The Christian-Social and the Greater Germany groups, in short the whole of the Right, accused the social-democrats of being Bolsheviks and of preparing for revolution. Throughout Austria the

¹¹ Ibid, p. 101.

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Heimwehr now began to spread and advance vigorously; supported by considerable financial resources supplied mainly by industry, they became a power to be reckoned with. This was first noticeable in respect of the armed forces, but very soon the Heimwehr set out to influence the parties of the bourgeoisie both ideologically and politically, and to overtrump them. It is noteworthy that in the years 1927 to 1933, during this tempestuous phase of development, the Frontkämpfer Association in eastern Austria lost every vestige of importance; gradually it broke up and was absorbed by the Heimwehr and from 1932 onwards by the National-Socialist party as well.

The rise of the Heimwehr in 1927 was more than a reaction to the events of July or a counter-offensive by the anti-marxist front; it represented also the breakthrough of modes of thought partly borrowed from fascist ideology and admittedly very much akin to it. Indeed, the material support which the Heimwehr received could not alone account for its rise. Chancellor Seipel, completely misinterpreting what was happening, presented the Heimwehr as a force protecting democracy. In one of his celebrated speeches (at Tübingen, 26 July 1929) he defended it, with deliberate ambiguity, against those critics both at home and abroad who, at this early stage, recognized that the movement represented a danger to democracy:

In our land of Austria there exists a mighty mass movement which wants to liberate democracy from party rule. The pillars of this movement are the Heimwehr. My criticism of pseudo-democracy is not directed against one particular party only, but against all those which follow its lead. All parties in Austria have their doubts of the rightness and lawfulness of our present system of government except the Social-Democratic party, which refuses to listen to criticism and regards as sacred precisely those aspects of our democracy which are not good. It is actually for this reason, and for this reason only, that the Heimwehr movement is in conflict with the social-democrats. This has nothing to do with class warfare. The Heimwehr includes citizens of every class among its members and supporters. The world has probably heard very different verdicts on the Heimwehr. Quite understandably there has been a deliberate campaign to give a false picture of the movement. It is true that the Austrian Heimwehr exerts a form of military discipline over its members. This is not a sign of militarism; it is done for the sake of discipline. The main danger which it faces, and of which its best members are well aware, is that while engaged in a struggle against the predominance of

parties, it may itself degenerate into a mere political party. Only a discipline similar to that of an army will save them from this danger. It is true that the Heimwehr cultivates a spirit of combat in its ranks and that this spirit has time and again been manifested in defensive struggles against the terrorism which the social-democrats deny in theory, but which unfortunately they again and again exercise in practice. It is true that the Heimwehr has occasionally also fallen foul of administrative bodies and functionaries of the majority parties. But this has happened only when these clearly displayed the influence of undemocratic party rule. That is the truth.¹²

Seipel believed, wrongly, that when the moment came he would still be in a position to keep the movement within bounds. He failed to realize that the Heimwehr detachments were growing stronger month by month, and that they were constructing for themselves a doctrine fed by many streams, which would in the end overthrow the democratic constitution by extra-parliamentary means. The watchword soon became not anti-marxism, but war against democracy in general.

This sharp break in the ideological development of the Heimwehr is of the utmost importance. From out of the ranks of an armed host of peasants led by members of the petty-bourgeoisie and pensioned-off officers, there arose a movement which tried zealously to equip itself with an appropriate ideology, but which, subjected as it was to a wide variety of influences, never succeeded in achieving a coherent programme. Although Italian fascism was most unpopular in Austria on account of South Tyrol, nevertheless Italy and above all Mussolini were intensely interested in the Heimwehr movement. Recent research has shown that both moral and material support was given by Italy from 1928 onwards. Kerekes' study, based on the files of the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs, shows that already in 1928 Mussolini was engaged in far-reaching political and military schemes in the Danube basin. A memorandum by the Hungarian prime minister Bethlen indicates the ends Mussolini was pursuing.¹³

I consider it necessary that we should first discuss the whole situation and agree on the common aims as well as on the political methods and paths we should follow. In this regard there are two directions in which common action by Hungary and Italy can be envisaged. One aim should be

¹² H. Arthofer, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹³ Lajos Kerekes, *loc. cit.*, pp. 3 ff.

to ensure that in Austria, with the help of the Heimwehr, a government of the Right should take over. The present government's aims in the field of foreign affairs do not in all respects resemble ours and they follow a policy of friendship with Czechoslovakia and indeed with the whole Little Entente which much displeases the government of Hungary. In my view, Seipel's foreign policy is more or less in accord with Benes' ideas. He is an opponent of the *Anschluss* and he would like to set up in the Danube basin, if not a confederation of states, at least an economic block. This policy makes him a friend of the Czechs. He does not believe that a strong and independent Hungarian state, which could be driven to enter this block only by force of arms, would be advantageous for Austria. A regime of the Right, which would come to power with the help of Italy and Hungary and which would lean on these two countries for support, would insofar benefit Italy as it would harp less on the Tyrol question. It would even delay the *Anschluss*, for in internal affairs it would have a totally different outlook from the present German government – a government which might be even further to the left after the next elections – and these opposing policies in home affairs would certainly postpone the *Anschluss*. For Hungary, too, a government of the Right in Austria would be advantageous, because communications and the trade in arms between Hungary and Italy would be safeguarded.

In my opinion, the setting up of a government of the Right has now become easier, because the Heimwehr has extended its organizational network and has established certain contacts with the Vienna chief of police and with several army leaders. In the event of their taking action, they can count on the goodwill of these bodies. According to my information the Heimwehr would need about 300,000 schillings to complete the building up of their organization as well as a certain amount of help in procuring arms. I am in contact with them and have been informed that provided they receive adequate assistance they are prepared to go into action at an appropriate time. They have suggested that I should act as their intermediary. I would therefore propose that Italy should give them the assistance they request and furthermore should accept me as the recognized go-between.

On Friday, 6 April I again met Mussolini and he gave me a precise answer, namely: 'I am ready to place at your disposal for transfer to the Austrian rightist organizations one million lire, either in a lump sum or in instalments; I am also prepared to hand over to them at the frontier the arms they require, provided that they give an undertaking about when and in what measure they will seize power in the foreseeable future. Yes, when this has been accomplished, I shall also be ready to treat with the new government about improvements in the lot of the German minority in South Tyrol.'

Early in June 1928, Richard Steidle, the leader of the Heimwehr in the Tyrol, addressed to his Hungarian friends a memorandum on the secret political aims of the Heimwehr. This too is in the Hungarian archives:

The Heimwehr is at present in a state of transition; from being an organization purely for defence it is becoming an organization with national and political aims. The momentum generated by the intense anti-marxist outlook of its members must and will force the so-called ruling parties to alter the semi-bolshevist constitution which came into being under pressure from the Reds of the Wiener Strasse, no matter what resistance or other reactions this provokes.

The 150,000 men now organized in the ranks of the H.W., who are prepared to stake their lives on the triumph of their beliefs, cannot and will not be satisfied with the role of a growling dog, crouching and keeping watch until his owner, in this case the government parties, lets him off his chain, as happened on 15 July 1927, only to tie him up again as soon as his job has been finished against the thief who has broken in. They insist on having their share in the fashioning of the state.¹⁴

Mussolini had a good understanding of Austrian political conditions, acquired before 1914 when he was a social-democrat. His accommodating attitude had a realistic background. In the event of its seizing power, the Heimwehr was to renounce South Tyrol and to change the Austrian constitution at the earliest possible date, at the outside not later than 15 March 1930. A series of mass demonstrations and protest marches by the Heimwehr, above all the famous rally of 7 October 1928 in Wiener Neustadt, a citadel of the Social-Democratic party, was intended to drive the hesitant government, and above all Dr Seipel, into altering the constitution, perhaps by some kind of *putsch* or *coup d'état*. Mussolini's main object, which he pursued steadfastly until 1934, was the elimination of the Social-Democratic party of Austria, whose leaders were personally known to him and which he hated with the single-mindedness of a renegade.¹⁵

These secret contacts with Italy, hidden from the public eye, but nevertheless every now and again arousing suspicions that were strenuously denied by the Heimwehr, brought in their wake the

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁵ For Mussolini's activities in pre-war Austria see the instructive essay of Hans Kramer, 'Die Versamlungsreden Mussolinis in Deutschtirol im Jahre 1909', in: *Historisches Jahrbuch* (Munich), 1955, p. 765.

ready acceptance of purely fascist ideas. In 1926, when the law on syndicates was introduced in Italy, the Heimwehr journals openly praised 'fascist socialism':

One thing is certain, that Italy today, thanks to tightly controlled trade unions, is spared serious economic conflicts, and that fascism is therefore able to use all its energies for carrying through such internal and external policies as it considers advisable.¹⁶

Even more important was the fact that there existed in Austria itself a doctrine which could provide the ideology of the Heimwehr with a groundwork of theory. It had found some favour among the intelligentsia – from the National Liberals to the Catholics – and could easily be adapted as an Austrian version of fascism. It was the universalist philosophy of Othmar Spann, a professor at the University of Vienna. Both Spann's book *Vom wahren Staat* (first published in Leipzig in 1921) and his lectures furnished the Heimwehr with a part of its ideology. Above all else, it seized upon the concept of the corporate state. In a very amateurish fashion and without a proper understanding of Spann's meaning, the Heimwehr movement thought it had discovered in the ideology of the corporations or *Stände* a panacea for the future and an Austrian complement to the fascist ideas which had already been taken over. Groups of influential intellectuals, such as the German Club in Vienna, intervened in this discussion about the Heimwehr programme. The Club, a meeting place for business men and academicians belonging to radical and German-national groups, arranged a series of lectures in which both Professor Spann and Dr Richard Steidle, as well as representatives of the German *Stahlhelm* took part to discuss a programme. Its first objective was to alter the constitution; the ultimate aim was to set up a new type of state. Even before this the programme of a revival of the *Stände* had been proclaimed, particularly by Pfrimer, the leader of the Styrian Heimwehr. Walter Heinrich, a colleague of Spann's, was the main proponent of the idea of a corporate state.¹⁷

Even at the time of its greatest expansion in 1928/9, the Heimwehr was not immune to altercations within its own ranks. In Lower

¹⁶ *Alpenländische Heimatwehr*, No. 5, May 1926.

¹⁷ Cf. Schweiger, *op. cit.*, p. 225, also the writer's study: 'Zur Vorgeschichte des Korneuburger Eides', in: *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur*, April 1963. Vienna, pp. 146 ff.

Austria and the Burgenland especially, the Heimwehr was closely associated with the Christian-Social party and refused to accept accretions of fascist and German-national theories. Julius Raab, a Christian-Social member of the legislature, later to become prime minister, played an important part in these disputes. He had joined the Lower Austrian Heimwehr at Seipel's request but dissociated himself more and more from the radical wing under Steidle and Pfrimer.¹⁸

It was not until about 1930 that Prince Starhemberg, at that time regional leader in Upper Austria, committed himself to the ideology of the new fascist course. Starhemberg's activities in *Freikorps Oberland* and in national-socialist groups in Munich in 1923 had bound him closely to Hitler's way of thought. Mussolini's massive support of Starhemberg increasingly moulded the Heimwehr into a political instrument which, in the elections of 1930, was able to operate at a parliamentary level. Starhemberg stood as candidate of his own new party, the *Heimatblock*. In spite of Mussolini's support, the block obtained only 228,000 votes (the social-democrats got one and a half million), so it was with a contingent of only eight members that Starhemberg entered Parliament.¹⁹ Before this, an attempt had been made to resolve internal dissensions by the solemn proclamation of a programme. This was done on 18 May 1930, at a conference of Heimwehr leaders in the small town of Korneuburg in Lower Austria. The programme became famous as the 'Korneuburg Oath'. The text – a conglomeration of German-national, patriotic Austrian, and fascist ideas – deserves to be given in full:

We are determined to rebuild Austria from its foundations!

We are determined to bring into being the Volksstaat of the Heimat-schutz.

We demand of every comrade:

undaunted faith in the fatherland,
untiring zeal in service, and
passionate love of his native land.

We are determined to take over the state and to remould it and its economy in the interests of the whole *Volk*.

We must forget our own advantage, must subordinate absolutely all

¹⁸ See Kerekcs, *op. cit.*, p. 9, and Starhemberg's unpublished memoirs, p. 33 (facsimile in the Vienna Institut für Zeitgeschichte).

¹⁹ See the writer's 'Julius Raab', in: *Neue österreichische Biographie*, Vol. XVI, Vienna, 1965.

party ties and party interests to the aims of our struggle, for we are determined to serve the whole community of the German *Volk*!

We repudiate western parliamentary democracy and the party state!

We are determined to replace them with government by the corporations (*Stände*) and by a strong national leadership which will consist, not of the representatives of parties, but of leading members of the large corporations and of the ablest, most trustworthy men in our own mass movement.

We are fighting against the subversion of our *Volk* by marxist class-struggle and liberal and capitalist economics.

We are determined to bring about an independent development of the economy on a corporate basis. We shall overcome the class struggle and replace it by dignity and justice throughout society.

We are determined to raise the standard of living of our *Volk* by fostering an economy based on the soil and administered for the good of all.

The state is the personification of the whole *Volk*; its power and leadership ensure that the interests of the *Stände* are contained within the framework of the needs of the whole community.

Let every comrade realize and proclaim that he is one of the bearers of a new German national outlook, namely:

that he is prepared to offer up his blood and his possessions, and that he recognizes three forces only: Faith in God, his own unbending will, the commands of his leaders!²⁰

The programme thus proclaimed was generally judged – by the Heimwehr itself as well – to be completely fascist in conception. Dr Pfrimer, who a year later was the first of its leaders to attempt, by means of a *putsch*, to realize the programme, declared in a speech about the Korneuburg programme given on the very day of its announcement:

On all sides the conviction was evident that here in Austria only fascism could now save us. (Loud and enthusiastic applause.) We must make an attempt to seize power; then the leaders of our movement will be able to take the business of government in hand. We already have the power to seize the initiative and the strength to change Austria into a true people's state.²¹

Despite this bombast, and its efforts in the 1930 elections, the Heimwehr increasingly lost political influence at home. The danger

²⁰ Reproduced in *Heimatschutz in Österreich*, p. 43.

²¹ Schweiger, *op cit.*, p. 210, quoting the Heimatschutz journal *Der Panther*, 24 May 1930.

that power would be seized by violence receded with Dr Johann Schober's able handling of the negotiations concerned with bringing the constitution up to date, and his unyielding attitude in face of the threats of a Heimwehr *putsch*. It was becoming obvious that the Heimwehr was breaking up into separate ideological groups. The Styrian Heimatschutz was being steadily infiltrated with national-socialist ideas. On 13 September 1931 Dr Pfrimer attempted a *putsch*, but it collapsed in face of resolute government resistance.²² For the Heimwehr it was a catastrophe, for it had been made plain that many of its sections, particularly in Lower and Upper Austria, had refused to take any part in it. The whole movement was being transformed. Those led by Starhemberg now tried to join forces with the Christian-Social party and with patriotic Austrian groups. The Styrian Heimwehr, on the other hand, found an heir and later an ally in the National-Socialist party, now entering the Austrian scene in force. When the severe economic and political crisis broke in 1932, the Heimwehr disintegrated into a number of fragments, each following a direction of its own. It was one of Chancellor Dollfuss' tactical achievements that in his struggle against the national-socialists he succeeded in winning over a section of the Heimwehr movement to his side.

The turning point was the elections of April 1932, as a result of which national-socialists entered the regional legislatures of Lower Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia, Styria, and Vienna. Even if the big parties, especially the Social-Democrats and to a somewhat lesser degree the Christian-Social party, had as yet little to fear from the increase in national-socialist votes, it was obvious that the smaller parties, such as the *Grossdeutsche Volkspartei*, the *Landbund*, and above all the *Heimatblock* (the parliamentary representation of the Heimwehr) had lost a considerable number of votes. The Styrian Heimwehr went over to the national-socialists. The Styrian Heimatschutz entered into a pact with the Austrian NSDAP. On 19 June 1933 both bodies were banned by the government. (After the *Anschluss*, a number of prominent Heimwehr leaders, such as Kammerhofer and Rauter, were given important commands in the SS.) The remaining groups, particularly those led by Starhemberg and Major Emil Fey, the leader of the Vienna

²² See Josef Hofmann: *Der Pfrimer-Putsch*, published by the Österreichisches Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 4 (Graz, 1965).

Heimwehr, whose patriotism was of a more purely Austrian character, became allies of the Chancellor. Dollfuss had managed to scrape together a coalition consisting of the Christian-Social party, the *Landbund*, and the *Heimatblock* which provided him with a majority of one vote. This situation, which gave them the power of tipping the scales, brought great advantages both to the Heimwehr and its foreign backers, especially Mussolini. The Chancellor, who at first had no intention of becoming a dictator, and whose origins in Lower Austria as a peasant democrat had made even the social-democrats consider him for a short time a suitable candidate for the post of prime minister of a grand coalition, was now faced with a terrible choice. He had either to yield to the national-socialist assault or seek allies wherever he could find them. As we know from the Hungarian files, it was principally Gömbös, the Hungarian prime minister, who at the end of 1932 or the beginning of 1933 once more brought in Mussolini. This step was taken because of Hungarian fears of a powerful democratic front, including the Social-Democratic party, in Austria. But because of the Social-Democratic party's tactically foolish opposition to the Lausanne loan, Dollfuss slowly reached the decision to conciliate both the Heimwehr and Mussolini, and to govern with the aid of emergency decrees.²³

On 17 October 1932 Major Fey, known to be an intransigent opponent of the social-democrats, became secretary of state for security in the Dollfuss government. Soon he had organized the Heimwehr into an armed auxiliary police force. Mussolini followed developments in Austria with great attention, for Hitler's accession to power and the challenge presented by the ever-increasing numbers of the national-socialists made that country a European problem. The chief aim of Dr Dollfuss, whose determination to stand up to Hitler-Germany should on no account be doubted, was to preserve the country's independence. Italy, a neighbour of Austria both well disposed and militarily prepared, stood ready to help. The Hirtenberg arms affair in January 1933 had already shown the world that Italy was ready to use any means to promote a fascist regime in Austria. On 4 March 1933, the more or less accidental resignation of all three chairmen of Parliament gave Dollfuss the

²³ For the growing Italian-Hungarian influence in Austria see: L. Kerekes, 'Akten des ungarischen Ministerium des Äusseren zur Vorgeschichte der Annexion Österreichs', *Acta Historica*, vol. vii, no. 3-4, Budapest, 1960.

opportunity to set up an authoritarian regime, and Austria began the journey which with the aid of the Heimwehr led to the so-called corporative State.

The National-Socialist party in Austria was banned following their murderous assaults on 19 June 1933. The Social-Democratic party, enjoying the support of over 40% of the voters, was waiting passively, to see how matters would develop. The driving force behind Dollfuss, who in the spring of 1933 had not yet formed any settled plan, was undoubtedly the Heimwehr under Starhemberg. The latter, at Mussolini's request, placed himself at the Chancellor's disposal for the experiment in authoritarian rule. The great Heimwehr demonstration on 14 May 1933 put a seal on the alliance which, under the name of the Fatherland Front, was to combat national-socialism. This was to develop into a totalitarian government party on the lines of the fascist and national-socialist parties and was to last until the loss of Austrian independence in March 1938.²⁴

Dollfuss' purpose in founding the Front was the subjugation of the parliamentary parties and the creation of a united front of patriotic Austrians. He had first obtained Mussolini's support through the efforts of Gömbös and Starhemberg, who twice made the journey to Rome on his behalf. In the notes he made in London, Prince Starhemberg mentions that it was he who, shortly after Hitler's seizure of power, had drawn Dollfuss' attention to the possibility of defeating the national-socialist terrorists by organizing an Austrian counter-terror and by activating Austrian patriots. The gist of the proclamation of 21 May 1933, announcing the formation of the Front, consisted in a declaration of war against all who threatened Austria's safety. It concluded with the following words:

All groups, all party organizations, all associations and societies that want to serve their fatherland must join together to form one great and vigorous army united in one great and common aim: Austria and her right of existence; Austria and her duty to survive so that her mission in Central Europe may be accomplished for the future good of every German.

Men and women of Austria!

It is the duty of every upright Austrian to offer his services to the Fatherland Front. Everybody, organizations and individuals, men and

²⁴ For the history of the Fatherland Front see Irmgard Bärnthaler, *op. cit.*

women, the old and the young, in fact all who love Austria will join the Front. Hail Austria! Hail Dollfuss our leader!²⁵

The correspondence between Dollfuss and Mussolini, found after the end of the war, clearly proves that Mussolini was using the Heimwehr as a weapon with which to coerce Dollfuss, who was still hesitating, into setting Austrian internal politics on a fascist course.²⁶ In a speech of 11 September 1933, Dollfuss made an attempt to conform to Mussolini's wishes by repudiating not only marxism but also the democratic and liberal ideologies of the past. Gradually, too, the Fatherland Front made its mark, for, partly in competition but at times in partnership with the Heimwehr, it became the instrument through which the increasingly authoritarian regime exercised its control. The system was copied from the methods used in Germany and Italy, but it differed in that the radical aims of the Heimwehr were blocked by Dollfuss, who preferred to develop the corporative state according to the maxims of the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, rather than follow the path of fascism.²⁷ After the events of 12 February 1934 which, as we know today, followed strong pressure by Mussolini, the Heimwehr, incorporated into the Fatherland Front as a 'shield for its defence', was for a short time in the ascendant. Its Vienna leader, Major Fey, seemed to be on the way to succeeding Starhemberg as the 'ideal dictator' of Austria. It even looked as if he might one day become a danger to Dr Dollfuss and his christian-social followers. Indeed, just before his murder, the Chancellor tried to turn the rivalry between Starhemberg and Fey to his own advantage by depriving the latter of his powers.

The events of 25 July 1934 shook the newly-established regime to its foundations. It was only support from Mussolini which saved Austria from the threat of destruction. After the murder of Dollfuss, Hitler was forced to draw back.

The years of Schuschnigg's government were marked by struggles between the various factions supporting the regime. During

²⁵ Arthofer, *op. cit.*, pp. 41 ff.

²⁶ *Geheimer Briefwechsel Mussolini-Dollfuss* (Vienna, 1949). Particular importance attaches to Mussolini's letter of 9 September 1933, in which he recommends that Austria should turn fascist as a means of defence against national-socialism.

²⁷ Alexander Novotny: 'Der berufsständische Gedanke in der Bundesverfassung des Jahres 1934', in: *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur*, 5 Jg., F.5, 1961, pp. 209 ff.

1935–6, Schuschnigg and the Fatherland Front were able to hold back the Heimwehr and the smaller para-military organizations and to isolate Starhemberg. The authoritarian state and strong leadership were embodied in the Fatherland Front itself. The type of military politician represented by the Heimwehr could not be allowed to lead an independent existence outside the state party. The end of the militant wing of the fascist movement in Austria followed grotesquely enough upon Starhemberg's last overt effort to make certain, in all circumstances, of Mussolini's support. On 13 February 1936, at the end of the Abyssinian campaign, he sent the following telegram to Mussolini:

In the consciousness of the close bonds of sympathy which involve me as a fascist in the destiny of fascist Italy, I congratulate Your Excellency with all my heart both in my own name and in the name of all those who are fighting for the triumph of the fascist idea, on the glorious and wonderful victory of Italian fascist arms over barbarians, on the victory of the spirit of fascism over dishonesty and hypocrisy, and on the victory of fascist devotion and disciplined determination over mendacious demagoguery. Long live the clear-sighted leader of victorious fascist Italy; may the fascist idea triumph throughout the world!²⁸

Schuschnigg was unwilling to tolerate this denigration of the League of Nations, on which Austria was dependent financially. He excluded Starhemberg from the government and from the Fatherland Front. The Heimwehr was silently absorbed into the Front militia, which had been taken over by the army. It was only just before the fateful events of 12 February 1938 – Schuschnigg's meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden – that former Heimwehr circles became politically active once more, but they were no longer in a position to exert any significant influence on the tragic developments that followed.²⁹

²⁸ Charles A. Gulick, *Österreich von Habsburg zu Hitler* (Vienna, 1948), p. 442.

²⁹ See the writer's study: 'Ernst Rüdiger Fürst Starhemberg und die politische Entwicklung in Österreich im Frühjahr 1938', in *Österreich und Europa* (Vienna, 1965).