

Austrian Anti-Semitism Questioned

NEW YORK — Top leaders of the American Jewish Committee, reporting on a just-completed mission to assess the impact on the Austrian Jewish community of Kurt Waldheim's election as Austrian President, announced a joint three-pronged American Jewish-Austrian program to measure and try to reduce Austrian anti-Semitism.

The elements of the program are these: 1) a major conference involving academic research institutes on anti-Semitism in Austria; 2) a symposium on the contribution of Jews to Austria and to American culture; and 3) an Austrian symposium on combatting anti-Semitic tendencies that would incorporate experiences in Austria, West Germany, and the U.S.

A joint working group authorized by the Austrian Government and the American Jewish Committee was established to implement this unprecedented program.

The AJC group, the first from an American Jewish organization to visit Austria since the Presidential elections that highlighted revelations about the past of Dr. Waldheim, former United Nations General Secretary and Austrian Foreign Minister, returned to the U.S. last week. They had held meetings with major officials of the Austrian Government, including Chancellor Franz Vranitzky and Foreign Minister Peter Jankowitsch, leaders of the major political parties, leaders of the Austrian Jewish community, U.S. Ambassador Ronald S. Lauder and his embassy staff, educators, business, cultural, Catholic-Jewish relations, and research experts.

The AJC delegation reported at a news conference at AJC headquarters, 165 East 56th Street, New York City, chaired by Theodore Ellenoff, AJC President. A minute of silence in memory of the victims of the attack on a synagogue in Istanbul, Turkey, opened the meeting. Mr. Ellenoff had planned to head the mission but was temporarily indisposed, and he asked Leo Nevas, chair of AJC's Board of Governors, to head it.

With Mr. Nevas on the trip were Edward E. Elson of Atlanta, chair of AJC's Board of Trustees; Miles Jaffe of Detroit, chair of AJC's International Relations Commission; Dr. David M. Gordis, William Trosten, and Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, respectively AJC's Executive Vice President, Associate Director, and Director of International Relations. The mission was initiated and organized by AJC's International Relations Department.

Mr. Nevas explained that the mission, which went to Austria in response to a directive from AJC's Board of Governors of last June, had a number of purposes:

- * To gain first-hand knowledge about the situation of the 9,000-member Austrian Jewish community in the wake of the Presidential elections and to convey solidarity with this community;

- * To obtain a more precise picture of the nature and extent of anti-Semitism in Austria, and specifically, the political exploitation of anti-Jewish bigotry during the recent elections;

- * To ascertain what the Austrian government and other key public officials and institutions were doing - or were not doing - in facing up to Austria's role in the Nazi period, and in combatting the legacy of various forms of anti-Semitism - religious, racial, and cultural - in that nation;

- * To convey to Austrian leadership that Austria's current "image problem" must be addressed by systematic steps to current anti-Semitic tendencies and not by cosmetic efforts;

- * To develop a clearer picture of Austria as an East-West crossroads of asylum for refugees and immigrants, particularly the Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union, among others.

In pursuing these goals, Mr. Nevas said that the AJC group had established particularly warm relations with the Austrian Jewish community. Its leaders pointed out that the situation among Austria's Jews had "changed dramatically" during the presidential campaign and elections, adding that for the first time in the 30 years since the end of World War II, "anti-Semitism was used for political purposes." With anti-Semitism "manipulated from the top downward," many in the Austrian Jewish community reported that they felt "pushed aside" by political leaders of both major parties, making them feel "insecure and vulnerable."

He reported further than Dr. Simon Wiesenthal, the legendary Nazi-hunter, with whom the group met, had explained that the real victim of the Presidential elections was "the image of Austria," and that the people of Austria had avoided making any moral or material restitution to the Jewish people during the past 40 years.

Mr. Nevas told of the series of meetings in Austria, arranged by Dr. Heinz Kienzl, General Manager of the Austrian National Bank in Vienna, who had coordinated the trip for the AJC group, with leading Austrian social scientists. Mr. Nevas reported that these social scientists,

who had been engaged in public opinion polls and research studies on the state of anti-Semitism in Austria, held that anti-Semitism affected "10 to 15 percent" of the population, and was largely rooted in the older generation, in rural areas, and among the less educated.

Such findings, Mr. Nevas went on, were challenged by the members of the AJC mission, who pointed out that social science research could not be separated from historic reality, which included political anti-Semitism that was considered a model for gaining political power by Hitler. The AJC group added that the Austrian Jewish community felt threatened after the recent presidential election. Mr. Nevas reported.

"The AJC group acknowledges that Austria is a Western democracy, and has made a critical contribution through its civilized treatment of refugees. But democracy presupposes an intense commitment to civility, and uncivil language has cost Austria the loss of such goodwill in the Western world. It is important to restore that goodwill by making it clear that anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to serve as an acceptable vehicle for political discourse."

In an exchange of letters between himself and Dr. Kienzl that was made public at a news conference, the AJC leader urged that the Austrian Government find "appropriate ways" to assure the Austrian Jewish Community of support for its security and well-being. It was to this call that Dr. Kienzl listed the three provisional projects, and Mr. Nevas explained that the working group had been established by AJC to pursue these projects with appropriate Austrian authorities.

Behind The Scenes

At The United Nations

By David Horowitz

A World-Union Press Feature

(Continued from page 4)

an impending holocaust and urged to leave, few heeding-- he spoke nostalgically of the great Zionist leader's periodic visits to America always availing himself of the continuous hospitality of the Spektor home in New York.

During the pleasant luncheon interview here, at which UN correspondent and radio commentator Shimon Baker also participated, the name of Israel's dynamic Ambassador Benjamin Netanyahu came up and replying to a query by this writer, Eryk Spektor said that he fully agreed with the Ambassador's observation to the effect that Israel's situation here in this house of contention is improving...More Black Africans are resuming their relations and the door of the UN is closed to Arafat...Perhaps this change for the better, Spektor noted, is because Waldheim is no longer here and the oil glut is.

The 1986 gala Award event will take place on Thursday, November 6, in the "Egyptian Temple" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where the recipients and guests will also take in "Treasures of the Holy Land: Ancient Art from the Israel Museum."

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