



# Force Waldheim to resign!

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Every country gets the politicians it deserves? goes the old saying. Certainly, in the figure of Kurt Waldheim, the Second Republic has found the personification of its own vital ideological lies and the living symbol of the political hypocrisy of its ruling class. The mastermind and the accomplice in the general staff of the German Wehrmacht as the Federal President, the man who was an ex-Nazi before 1945 and an obliging democrat after, the man who tries to sell his notorious silences over his own wartime past as a genuine lapse of memory? Waldheim is certainly no ?historical accident? for Austrian democracy. On the contrary, as the head of state he has given this system exactly the image it deserves?the face of the fellow traveller and supporter of the fascist dictators whose ?doing his duty? in the world war was accepted by the domestic bourgeoisie as an excellent credential for his later career as a representative of democratic class rule.

After its one unsuccessful attempt in 1848, the Austrian bourgeoisie has never seriously fought for the realisation of a bourgeois democratic form of state. In contrast to, say, the French or the Italians, the introduction of bourgeois democracy in this country was not the product of a successful bourgeois revolution. Instead it was twice imposed on the ruling class by their wartime enemies, after catastrophic military defeats, as a component part of the political reparations burden.

More than this, if the historical task in 1848 consisted in the creation of an all-German democratic republic, then this way forward was blocked off by the victory of Habsburg reaction. Likewise, as the German Reich was founded in 1871 in a reactionary manner under the iron fist of Hohenzollern militarism and Bismarck?s Junkers, so the German nationalism of the Austrian bourgeoisie and the alpine petit bourgeoisie turned into the reactionary ideology of Great German imperialism which was to reach its peak in the euphoria surrounding the Anschluss of 1938.

No less reactionary was the laying of the foundations of Austrian independent statehood after the collapse of the Danube Monarchy in 1918: it was the imperialist interests of the Entente Powers which dictated the creation of a separate Austrian state, not the struggles of an oppressed nation (as was the case with the Czechs) which found expression in the creation of their own nation state.

However, 1918 also gave life to the threat of a proletarian revolution and, even though the social democracy did everything possible to stop such a development, in the eyes of the Austrian bourgeoisie every single democratic freedom granted to the workers? movement, and the democratic constitution of the Republic in general, was a potential danger to the maintenance of their power. Thus, even the bourgeois parties of the First Republic, led by the Christian Social Party itself, made no secret of their opposition to democracy. They did not rest until, in February 1934, against a background of world economic crisis and with the blessing of the Catholic Church and of Italian fascism, with the destruction and outlawing of the workers? organisations, they also liquidated bourgeois democracy.

Austro-fascism developed out of the ?Heimwehr? wing of the Christian Social Party. Its corporate-statist dictatorship was intended to prevent the further development of National Socialism. The fact that this domestic dictatorship served only as a precursor of National Socialism was a necessary consequence of the particular political and economic position of the Austrian bourgeoisie. It fell to National Socialism to exploit this three-fold reactionary heritage; German nationalist expansionism, enforced small nation status and brutal oppression of the labour movement, in the interest of the unification with the Third Reich. And it was the Austrian petit bourgeoisie, inflamed by the most malicious form of anti-Semitism, who provided the Stormtroopers of Nazi-fascist barbarism. The Austrian bourgeoisie and middle classes

of 1938 were in no way the victims of Hitler's annexationist plans. On the contrary, it was precisely the Anschluss with the Third Reich which liberated them from the helplessness and impotence of the previous period.

The Great German option, swapping the plume for the swastika, gave them the chance to play an integral part in German imperialism's greatest war of plunder, and corresponded fully to the interests of Austrian capitalism as well as to the subjective desires of the Austrian petit-bourgeoisie.

As the 'brown mob' indulged itself with the slaughter of Jews and the ruling class fused with its Great German brother via common Aryanisation, both of them prepared a triumphant welcome in Vienna for the return of the dictator from Linz. It is really little wonder that in occupied Austria, unlike in all the other countries of Europe, a bourgeois opposition only began to stir as the Red Army marched into the Vienna suburbs while, on the other side, an above average number of 'Easterners' [Austrians] fulfilled their duty in the terrorist organisations and as the concentration camp executioners of the Nazi regime.

The military defeat of German fascism, therefore, was also a disaster of unparalleled proportions for the Austrian bourgeoisie. Their own state apparatus was smashed and heavy industry was expropriated and placed under foreign control. Left to the mercy of the Allied occupation powers, the Austrian state had only the political compromise between the Soviet Union and the imperialist west, the creation of a neutral buffer state, to thank for its reinstatement.

This was a trade-off whereby the USSR agreed to the re-building of capitalism whilst the USA was prepared to leave aside the integration of Austria into NATO and its final ratification was put off for ten years.

While codified class collaboration, in the form of 'social partnership', provided the structural framework of the Second Republic, it was a complex of monstrous historical lies which was the basis of the official ideology of this state until today; the myth of Austria's role as a victim, the awkward covering up and suppression of all the authoritarian and fascist traditions of the bourgeois parties, the alleged collective re-education of the bourgeois and reformist politicians in the hail of bombs of the, in any case already lost, world war. Just as there was no struggle for bourgeois democracy against the Nazi terror-regime and it was only imported after its collapse so equally there was no real settling of accounts and no political victory over fascism. The National Socialists of 1938 disappeared without any difficulty into the democratic mass parties and immediately reappeared as fresh-baked anti-fascists to pursue their careers.

### **What's a war crime, after all?**

The biography of Kurt Waldheim reads like a detailed description of the history of the Austrian bourgeoisie, no matter how many gaps there are in his memory. He grew up in the well protected household of Austro-fascist catholicism. Through his hasty entry into the Stormtroopers and the Nazi Student League, he was just in time to join the celebration on the Heldenplatz.

He was a diligent and responsible officer of the Nazi Wehrmacht, whether at the front massacring Russians, as a staff officer in the rear deporting Jews, or liquidating partisans and wiping out suspects among the civilian population. And none of this stood in the way of his more democratic career as a diplomat and ambassador, his two terms as UN Secretary General and now President of the Republic. Why should it? in a state whose first President, Renner, publicly called for the Anschluss in 1938, whose Chancellor, Raab, had, in his time, taken the oath of the Heimwehr fascists and in whose governments and major parties notorious ex-Nazis attained prominence?

In an organisation such as the United Nations, in whose ranks so many regimes of war criminals and mass murderers act out the imperialist farce of a world parliament, why should anybody worry about the impeccability of the life of the Secretary General?

It was, and is, precisely this habitual hypocrisy of bourgeois anti-fascism which gives the Nazis, both the old ones and those still active, an easy conscience, which quietly rehabilitates them and then gives them public credibility as the blameless victims of an international campaign of slander. Even as the dark patches in the past of the presidential candidate became public, in the eyes of the bourgeois public the scandal only began when Waldheim refused to accept

any responsibility for them. The main charge against him was not that he took part in the deportation of the Jewish community from Thessalonika but that he would not appear as a credible head of state because he kept on insisting that he knew absolutely nothing about it! Not that he took part in the Wehrmacht's extermination campaigns in the Kozara Mountains (and for his assaults on Yugoslav territory was decorated with the Military Order of the Ustascha regime) but that at first he brazenly and obstinately insisted that he had never ever been in Yugoslavia! This twisted logic, which first pardons war crimes as an unimportant matter only the louder to complain about the lack of credibility and the diminished international status of their head of state has worked to Waldheim's advantage, both before and after his election as Federal President.

In fact, for public opinion, the scandal in the case of Waldheim began (and ended) exactly where it threatened to endanger the carefully put together facade of post war Austrian society both at home and abroad. The brown colours of Nazism, with which all the main parties are stained, began to show through the twee, picture postcard image of the Alpine republic. It is not what he actually did as a Wehrmacht officer, or what he allowed to happen, nor even the fact that he had been a Nazi that is the bone of contention here but that, through his obstinacy he might damage Austria's high standing in the world (that is to say, our excellent relations with US imperialism) . . .

After all, what is a war crime? It is a mark of the poverty of these democratic moralisers that they can only condemn fascism for its contravening of the Geneva and Hague Conventions but accept without objections the fundamental nature of its wars. The crimes of imperialist war are only identified with its 'excesses' and not in its 'normal conduct'. Correspondingly, the whole discussion about the Waldheim case revolves around whether he really was directly involved or not, how much (or how little) he actually knew, whether he acted as a convinced Nazi or not. What role he played as a staff officer in the fascist military apparatus, solely through his functions within the chain of command, is carefully left out of account.

And no wonder! If it were not then tens of thousands of Wehrmacht officers who also collaborated in the war (whether as conscious Nazis or just as military specialists within the machinery of repression) would also stand accused. That is the real point! Every one of them who held a leading position in the fascist state apparatus, whether in the military or the civilian spheres, voluntarily took co-responsibility for all the crimes of the Nazi tyranny.

And these leading positions are by no means limited to the summits of the Hitler regime; they begin with the judges, who condemned the tellers of Hitler jokes to the torture chambers and concentration camps, the mayor who helped to prepare the deportation of Jews from his community and the lieutenant who led his platoon on the Eastern Front in the invasion of the Soviet Union. All these people took their part in the conduct and maintenance of the Nazi dictatorship. They all consciously carried out their duty to the regime in order to further their personal careers in the fascist state. It was precisely on this army of millions of fellow travellers and collaborators that Nazi rule depended for its success.

No less hypocritical was the condemnation of National Socialism expressed by the victorious Allies after the defeat of the Third Reich. All the powers which sat in judgement on it and its most prominent representatives at Nuremburg had themselves made pacts with Hitler before, and even after, the outbreak of the Second World War. All of them, in the course of their own history, had committed exactly the same kind of crimes as those of which they accused the Nazis; genocide, mass deportations, civilian massacres, torture and abuse of the much praised human rights. Thus, Great Britain and France in their colonies, thus the USA against North America's original inhabitants and the populations of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, thus the USSR in the division of Poland (carried out jointly with the Nazis) and against the Crimean Tartars.

Precisely this ambiguity of the democratic, 'victors' justice' benefited fascism in the eyes of the masses here in Austria. Instead of condemnation it effectively rehabilitated it and the unscrupulous way in which the democratic governments took in and protected the mass murderers of the Gestapo into their own secret services (as with the USA in the case of Altmann-Barbie) completed the tragic farce of this so-called 'de-Nazification'. It is not to a Commission of Historians or the US Immigration Department that Waldheim and his like should be made to answer but to an international workers' tribunal of the victims of the fascist terror and of the Holocaust!

## **What is a head of state for?**

The office of the Federal President is anything but the necessary limit on parliamentary democracy that they like to tell us. In order to represent Austria adequately in the world one could as well choose our head of state out of the ranks of our winter sports stars or our no less well-known singers. In fact, however, the post of the Federal President is designed to provide a form of bonapartist dictatorship which can take hold of the business of the state should there be a crisis in the bourgeois democratic exercise of power, that is to say, should Parliament ever become incapable of functioning as the agent of bourgeois class rule.

The special powers of the President (the right to dissolve Parliament, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, the right of amnesty and the prerogative of mercy) which were, not accidentally, introduced by a constitutional reform in 1929, underline this eloquently. The fact that, for a long time, there has been no such presidential intervention in the internal affairs of the country has a very simple explanation: in the First Republic, it was the Christian Social majority itself which took the road of depriving Parliament of its power and it was the Chancellor who prepared the putsch so that the President was no longer needed. In the Second Republic, the parliamentary system has functioned so smoothly in the interest of the ruling class that there has been no need for such an intervention. Nonetheless, these forty years of social peace are now coming to an end and, in the face of a deepening economic crisis and growing social struggles, there is a real danger that precisely the kind of 'strong president' that Waldheim has made it clear he would like to be, could deliver the death blow to parliamentarism.

If Waldheim, even now, when he is in a situation of extreme political isolation and weakness, can still publicly insist that his 'critics should be silenced' it is not difficult to see what kind of regime could be expected under the right circumstances.

We are, fundamentally, enemies of any kind of presidential republic. However, where political tradition has ensured that the office of President is so firmly established as an institution of the state that its destruction could only take place as part of the overthrow of bourgeois parliamentarianism in general, we are in favour of, alongside the obligation of a general election for the President, the complete removal of all Bonapartist powers which could, potentially, enable him to close down the Parliament or suspend basic democratic rights. It has been said recently, in many quarters, that a resignation by Waldheim would need a constitutional amendment. Be that as it may, we are in favour of a constitutional amendment—one which would strip him of all the special powers of 1929, one which would unconditionally subordinate all his decisions to Parliament, which makes him subject to recall at any time—and gave him the average wage of a skilled worker !

## **Drive Waldheim from office!**

We do not demand Waldheim's resignation because his disputed past will harm Austria's reputation, nor because he cannot disprove the accusations against him. No, there are three concrete political grounds, based on entirely different considerations from those of most of his opponents, which allow us to call for his immediate resignation.

First, during his election campaign, and even more so during his period in office, Waldheim has become a declared representative of the most reactionary wing of the bourgeoisie. If we succeed in making him fall then we can inflict a heavy defeat on this brown and black mob. If we do not succeed, then the coalition of interests that are represented by the proposers of anti-working class austerity measures, the authoritarian state technocrats and the provincial anti-Semites, will have been able to maintain an important base for a future offensive. In this respect we should not forget Waldheim's 'Unemployment Speech' of last autumn.

Secondly, Waldheim's retreat would intensify all the contradictions of the delicately put together coalition government. One part of the OVP1 would love to get rid of him as soon as possible. Another part sees in him an ally and a guarantee of increasing its political weight on domestic questions. On the other hand, the SPO2 desperately needs the coalition as a disguise and to give an excuse to its rank and file and to the electorate for its reckless austerity programme. The SPO attacks Waldheim half-heartedly from the standpoint of the 'national interest', without using any serious political (as

opposed to moral) arguments against his continued presidency. All these internal contradictions of the already unstable coalition between the social democratic reformists and the bourgeoisie would be posed much more sharply by a mass campaign for the fall of Waldheim. It could even come to the break-up of the coalition and new elections. But that is exactly what we want to stop the coalition's austerity programme, to lead a simultaneous offensive against Waldheim and an offensive against the professional traitors of the working class in the party and trade union leadership of the social democracy!

Thirdly, the case of Waldheim has unintentionally revealed the rottenness of bourgeois democratic consciousness and the fascist swamp on which the Second Republic was founded and on which it still exists. Waldheim's past and present is an open wound on the body of the democratic state. The discussion in the past few months in Austria, as well as internationally, has done more to discredit belief in the bourgeois state and the dominant ideology of democratic class rule in the public's eye than ten years of abstract revolutionary propaganda. It is exactly that wound that we have to hit to prevent it closing, to prevent the abscess healing—as has happened often before. We demand Waldheim's resignation not to save Austria's reputation (we can leave that to diplomats of Waldheim's stripe), but to use a campaign against him to make the bourgeois essence of the system, that he heads, visible to the mass of the population.

We intervene in order to argue credibly for a revolutionary perspective that goes way beyond the horizons of the dominant idea of democracy, a perspective of working class democracy, of free soviet power and the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus. The political level from which such a perspective of a working class programme of struggle must begin, however, must be the immediate and most urgent demands of the working class in the face of mass redundancies, social cuts and the merciless austerity programme of the coalition government, the very government which the Waldheim case has thrown into such embarrassment.

The SPO has opposed Waldheim remarkably reluctantly. When the first accusations about his wartime past were raised it first tried to use them as moral ammunition—only to loudly proclaim its loyalty to the President as soon as Waldheim was elected. Only when the criticism would not stop and more facts reached the light of day; only when the Commission of Historians (which was intended to 'clean-up' Waldheim) produced its report, did demands for his resignation come to be heard again within the SPO. Its whole conduct, all the manoeuvring to maintain the coalition, the position of leaving it up to the President whether to go or not (instead of forcing the issue) and its latest project to put up a common, well-respected, candidate with the OVP (and from the OVP's ranks) should Waldheim go—has strengthened, not weakened, Waldheim's position, and has rendered the SPO's opposition to him more and more unbelievable.

Waldheim will not leave voluntarily. He has often stated that clearly. He has to be forced. All the parliamentary manoeuvres, all the moral appeals, all the exposure in the international mass media and all the reports of historians will not be able to do that. In order to force Waldheim to resign we need a mass movement of the trade unions and the SPO itself, one that expresses its protests openly and which connects this protest with the resistance to the policies of the government, policies of which Waldheim is already a symbol.

We need a mass movement on the streets which hits now—when the time has come for hitting—which calls for his resignation again and again without regard for the interests of the political strategists of the grand coalition. That Waldheim was allowed to be President of the OGB3 Congress last year was bad enough. It would be a political failure of the first order if the trade union movement were to remain completely silent now. It is a central task of all oppositional trade unionists to fight against the current sell-out of working class interests by the trade union and SPO leadership by organising a broad rank and file protest movement within the trade union movement.

The student strike last autumn showed what potential for protest has been revived at the universities. The central aim of the newly created student movement must be to make its protest and resistance felt in all spheres and on all questions. This is especially so in the case of Waldheim, where a common fight alongside the workers' movement is needed. On 24 October last year, some 50,000 people of all layers of the working population demonstrated against social cuts and austerity policies. This protest must be restarted and carried further. It must be extended to a general mobilisation for the fall of Waldheim.

We need a broad, general and public campaign of mass protest in order to force Waldheim's resignation. We must clearly try to organise it as a rank and file movement and turn it towards common action.

Instead of allowing 12 March to become an official festival of state loyalty, official state hypocrisy and final absolution for the fascist past, we should take the opportunity to make it the first decisive date on which such a movement must prove itself!

? Force Waldheim to resign!

? Organise a broad mass movement from below!

? For a clear and unambiguous break of the SPO with Waldheim!

? No toleration and no compromise with this president! to resign!

### **Notes**

1. Österreichische Volks Partei: Austrian Peoples' Party, main Austrian Conservative Party
2. Sozialistische Partei Österreichs: Austrian Social Democratic Party

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