

The Return of Fascism in Europe.

On 4 February 2000 a new coalition of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the extreme right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) was sworn into government marking the return of an extreme right party to government for the first time in Europe since the end of National Socialism in 1945.

Background.

The present leader of the FPÖ Jörg Haider took over the party in the mid 1980s and transformed it from a marginal party to the second strongest party at the last federal election in October 1999 when the party won 27% of the vote. The politics of Haider and the FPÖ are not only dominated by demagogic populism, the manipulation of prejudice against foreigners, a culture of defamation and racism but also by fascist ideology and a revisionist approach to Nazism. Throughout his career Haider has repeatedly made statements about the Nazi era which make his political color clear. According to Haider the labour policy of the Third Reich was "respectable", the concentration camps were "punishment camps", the SS were "respectable men of principle", Hitler, Stalin and Churchill were all equally criminal. FPÖ policy includes zero immigration, the separation of school classes with more than 30% "foreign" children etc.

Haider is not actually in the Austrian parliament (he is presently governor of the province of Carinthia) but he is the leader of the federal FPÖ and as such is the most powerful member of the party. All members of the party who are sitting in ministerial posts and on government seats do so with his grace.

At the last federal election the results were:

SPÖ (socialists) 33% FPÖ 27% ÖVP 27% Greens 10%

After four months of negotiating, the previous coalition partners SPÖ and ÖVP ended their attempts to build a new coalition at the end of January. The role of the ÖVP in this process seems more than questionable. They were the junior partners in the coalition with the socialists for 13 years and had the choice of once again accepting this role or of forming a coalition with the FPÖ who would leave the Chancellor's chair to the ÖVP in exchange for the coalition partnership bringing the far right FPÖ into power.

The Thin End of the Wedge

Rather than his fascist comments leading to Haider's disgraced departure from public life such ideology has become increasingly accepted in Austria to the extent that the conservative People's Party were prepared to enter a coalition government with Haider's FPÖ and this government is now ruling Austria. This is perhaps the most dangerous side of the whole process: the legitimisation of such ideology. The new government has appealed to its critics to judge on its work over the next years without realising that for the international community any "work" which legitimates a party from such an ideological background is the worst possible result. Many European nations have nascent far right parties who can't wait to present the "success" and legitimacy of this far right thin-end-of-the-wedge to the world at large. The declaration that the two coalition parties signed before entering government promising their "unswerving adherence to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of the people's of Europe" can be seen in the same light: a further attempt to legitimise far right ideology in government. It is questionable how long the new coalition will hold. Haider can, at present, be sure of increased electoral support at new elections and you can be sure he is far from satisfied with an ÖVP Chancellor. He is only waiting for the right moment (probably 6-12 months) to break the coalition, forcing elections to capitalise on his new-found "legitimacy" and become the most popular party.

Action

The EU has been admirable in its quick reaction to the threat in its midst and has already implemented a package of diplomatic sanctions against Austria which have so far been ignored by the new government. These sanctions will, it seems, need to be strengthened to convince the Austrian electorate that the international community will not accept such ideology as the FPÖ represents on an international level.

Individuals can also express their abhorrence at this development via e-mail to the following addresses:

The ÖVP:

New Chancellor: Wolfgang.Schuessel@oevp.at

The Parliamentary Party: övpklub@vpklub.parlinkom.gv.at

A senior minister: Maria.Rauch-Kallat@bp.oevp.at

Education Minister: Elisabeth.Gehrer@oevp.at

Foreign Minister: Benita.Ferrero-Waldner@oevp.at

To support institutions taking action:

Assistant to Nicole Fontaine, President of the EU Parliament: S Woodard, swoodard@europarl.eu.int

European socialists: pes@pes.org

Parliamentary group of European socialists: pesnet@europarl.eu.int

Boycotts are also possible. The Belgian foreign minister last week described skiing holidays in Austria under such a government as "immoral". In this sense boycotts of Austrian companies such as Austrian Airlines, Lauda Air etc. seem helpful to make it clear to this government that the politics Haider and the FPÖ represent can not be accepted. Contact address for further information: widerstand1938_2000@yahoo.co.uk

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