

The Situation of the Jews in Austria, April 1938

Report

Submitted to the Executive of the Zionist Organization

by Dr. Leo Lauterbachⁱ

...Generally speaking the situation in Vienna seemed to be, both on the non-Jewish and the Jewish side, characterized by confusion, uncertainty and a state of flux. The mission of Sir Wyndham Deedes was greatly handicapped by the fact that, at the time of his and my visit, there seemed to be no established authority from whom the official policy could be reliably ascertained and whose intervention could be solicited. The position might have changed since, but at the time it appeared that the chief authority was vested in the Gestapo, whose officials were at that time in Berlin and who, as we learned there afterwards, returned to Vienna with, it was stated, a full measure of independence from their headquarters in Berlin. Possibly the Gestapo are now under instructions from Herr Buerckel. A clear policy with regard to the Jewish problem in Austria has neither been announced in public, nor was it conveyed to us in the few interviews we succeeded in having. One cannot, however, avoid the impression that this policy will be essentially different from that adopted in Germany and that it may aim at a complete annihilation of Austrian Jewry. To all appearances, it is intended to eliminate them from economic life, to deprive them of all their financial resources, and to compel them either to starve or to leave the country without means, at the expense of the great Jewish organizations abroad and with the help of such countries as may be willing to receive them.

For reasons of their own the authorities seem to wish to deal with Austrian Jews without any interference by the Jews in Germany. One cannot help feeling that, after the protracted campaign of intimidation, the Jews of Austria have become a pliable instrument in the hands of their oppressors, who may think that they will achieve their ends more easily if they deal directly with people whose moral backbone has been broken.

If this analysis is correct, no effort should be spared on our side to counteract such tendencies and to give the Austrian Jews not only material support, but also moral encouragement. For that purpose it would seem to be the most urgent task of the moment to delegate to Austria representatives of the great Jewish and Zionist organizations abroad who, with permission of the authorities, would be allowed to act there, even if only temporarily, as advisers and helpers of the local leaders. In addition, any future financial support given by Jewish institutions abroad ought to be made dependent as far as possible upon the establishing of a permanent contact between the Jewish institutions in Vienna and those in Berlin....

(sgd) Leo Lauterbach

London,
29th April, 1938

Source: Y. Arad, Y. Gutman, A. Margaliot (editors), *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 92-93.

ⁱ Director of the Organization Department of the World Zionist Organization.