

Wolfgang Neugebauer
The Austrian Resistance
1938–1945



EDITION **STEINBAUER**

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Wolfgang Neugebauer

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Translated from the German by
John Nicholson and Eric Canepa



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The Dachau Song

The Dachau Song of September 1938 was the creation of two Viennese inmates, Jura Soyfer (words) and Herbert Zipper (music). The refrain 'Arbeit macht frei' was an allusion to the motto affixed to the concentration camp gates. Both Soyfer and Zipper were subsequently transferred to KZ Buchenwald, where Soyfer perished in 1939, while Zipper was released and survived the war to pen the English translation quoted here.

Das Dachaulied

Stacheldraht, mit Tod geladen,
Ist um unsre Welt gespannt.
Drauf ein Himmel ohne Gnaden
Sendet Frost und Sonnenbrand.
Fern von uns sind alle Freuden,
Fern die Heimat, fern die Frau'n,
Wenn wir stumm zur Arbeit schreiten,
Tausende im Morgengrau'n.

*Doch wir haben die Losung von Dachau
gelernt*

*Und wurden stahlhart dabei:
Bleib ein Mensch, Kamerad,
Sei ein Mann, Kamerad,
Mach ganze Arbeit, pack an, Kamerad,
Denn Arbeit, Arbeit macht frei!*

Vor der Mündung der Gewehre
Leben wir bei Tag und Nacht,
Leben wird uns hier zur Lehre
Schwerer, als wir's je gedacht.
Keiner mehr zählt Tag' und Wochen,
Mancher schon die Jahre nicht,
Und gar viele sind zerbrochen
Und verloren ihr Gesicht.

*Und wir haben die Losung von Dachau
gelernt ...*

Schlepp den Stein und zieh den Wagen,
Keine Last sei dir zu schwer.
Der du warst in fernen Tagen,
Bist du heut schon längst nicht mehr.
Stich den Spaten in die Erde,
Grab dein Mitleid tief hinein,
Und im eignen Schweiß werde
Selber du zu Stahl und Stein.

*Und wir haben die Losung von Dachau
gelernt ...*

Einst wird die Sirene künden:
Auf, zum letzten Zählappell!
Draußen dann, wo wir uns finden,
Bist du, Kamerad, zur Stell.
Hell wird uns die Freiheit lachen,
Vorwärts geht's mit frischem Mut,
Und die Arbeit, die wir machen,
Diese Arbeit, die wird gut!

*Doch wir haben die Losung von Dachau
gelernt*

*Und wurden stahlhart dabei:
Bleib ein Mensch, Kamerad,
Sei ein Mann, Kamerad,
Mach ganze Arbeit, pack an, Kamerad,
Denn Arbeit, Arbeit macht frei!*

The Dachau Song

Charged with death, high-tension wire
Rings around our world a chain.
Pitiless a sky sends fire,
Biting frost and drenching rain.
Far from us is lust for living,
Far our women, far our town
When we mutely march to toiling
Thousands into morning's dawn.

*But we all learned the motto of Dachau
to heed*

*And became as hardened as stone
Stay humane, Dachau mate,
Be a man, Dachau mate,
And work as hard as you can,
Dachau mate,
For work leads to freedom alone!*

Faced by ever-threatening rifles
We exist by night and day.
Life itself this hell-hole stifles
Worse than any words can say.
Days and weeks we leave unnumbered
Some forget the count of years
And their spirit is encumbered
With their faces scarred by fears.

But we all learned the motto of Dachau ...

Lift the stone and drag the wagon
Shun no burden and no chore
Who you were in days long bygone
Here you are not any more.
Stab the earth and bury depthless
All the pity you can feel,
And within your own sweat, hapless
You convert to stone and steel.

But we all learned the motto of Dachau ...

Once will sound the siren's wailing
Summons to the last roll-call.
Outside then we will be hailing
Dachau mates uniting all.
Freedom brightly will be shining,
For the hard-forged brotherhood
And the work we are designing
Our work it will be good.

*For we all learned the motto of Dachau
to heed*

*And became as hardened as stone
Stay humane, Dachau mate,
Be a man, Dachau mate,
And work as hard as you can,
Dachau mate,*

For work leads to freedom alone!

Source: Paul F. Cummins, *Dachau Song* (New York: Lang, 1992), pp. 89–90.

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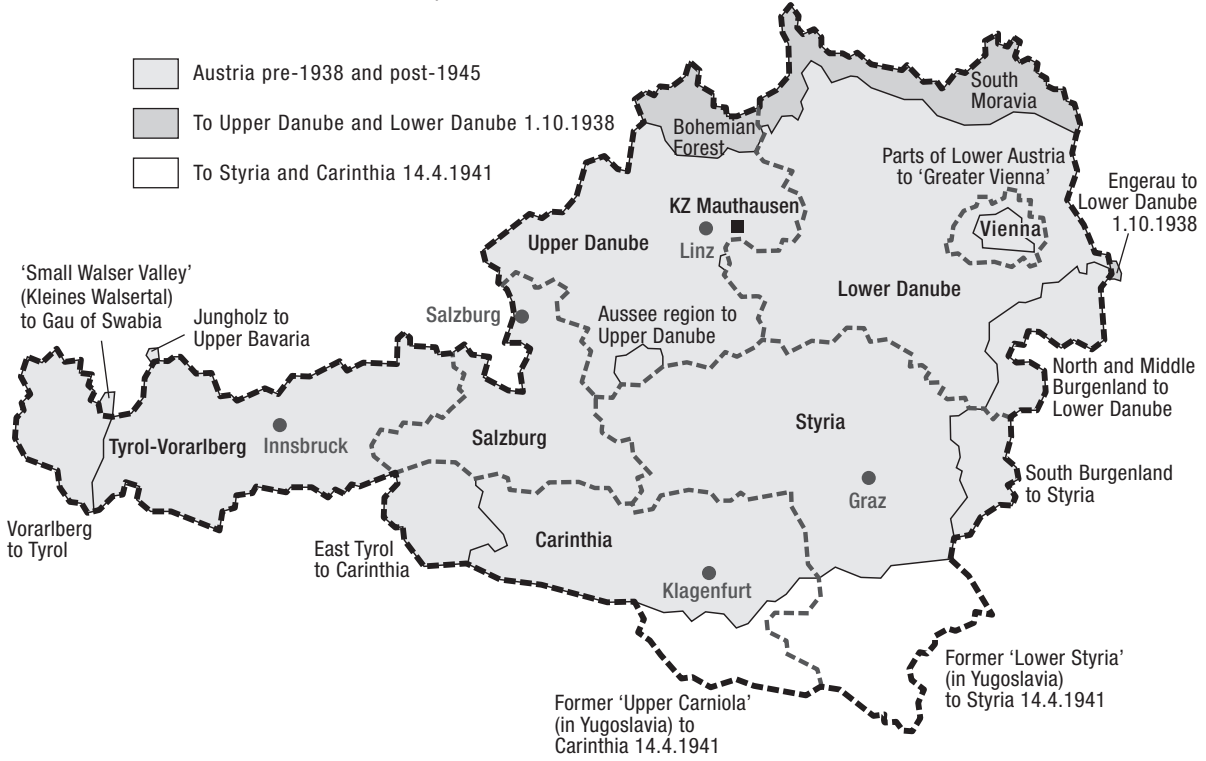
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AUSTRIA 1938–1945

The 'Seven Danube and Alpine Gaus' of the German Reich



'GREATER VIENNA'



Introduction

In 1963, the year of the foundation of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, DÖW), the fact of Austrian resistance to the National Socialist regime had not yet won general acceptance and was indeed vehemently rejected by the large mass of former National Socialists and war veterans. And when, as late as 1971, a star columnist of Austria's most widely read newspaper poured scorn on the DÖW (and on the Austrian resistance itself) by calling the centre an 'archive for the documentation of an Austrian resistance that never really existed', he was no doubt pandering to a long-standing prejudice common amongst the newspaper's readership.¹ In the course of time this kind of disparagement was superseded by a phenomenon we will consider later, namely, the practice of exploiting the Austrian resistance for purposes of political self-legitimation. Apart from the special case of Carinthia, where the federal province's Slovene partisans are still commonly described (even by important public figures) as having been 'Titoist Communists' and 'traitors to their country', the resistance and its protagonists hardly provoke any negative emotional reactions and are now generally accorded due recognition. One clear indication of this positive development is that by 2007, the year of the beatification of the Roman Catholic conscientious objector Franz Jägerstätter, the long-standing virulent resistance put up by war veterans to the honouring of this outstanding resistance figure had almost died out.²

My activities as an historian have been formatively influenced by the particular structure of the DÖW, where since 1969 I have worked in a milieu made up of former resistance activists and victims of Nazi persecution. When the DÖW was initiated in the early 1960s, it was not, as one might suspect, the creation of politicians or federal authorities intent on having evidence gathered for the 'victim theory' ('Opfertheorie'), that is to say, the official line that Austria had been the first victim of National Socialism. On the contrary, the DÖW was founded exclusively on the initiative of individuals who had been personally involved: former resistance fighters, former concentration camp inmates, and others who had returned to Austria from their wartime exile, all working together under the direction of Herbert Steiner. The one common concern shared by all involved was to document the experience of resistance, repression and persecution, and to pass on the record to the younger generation in order to prevent fascism, racism and inhumanity from ever raising their ugly heads again. The lack of adequate financial means was compensated for by a high degree of idealism. At the beginning nobody was employed on a full-time

basis and the team of collaborators and committee members consisted almost exclusively of former victims of persecution and resistance activists working on a voluntary basis (mostly after having retired from full-time employment). Even today the character and activities of the DÖW still bear the imprint of this founding generation. Far from being a dead establishment devoted to archiving for its own sake, the DÖW is a living institution where the past is explored and presented on the basis of first-hand experience. Long before ‘oral history’ won general acceptance in our universities, the communicating of the past by word of mouth was an everyday habit at the DÖW, practised in innumerable coffee-break conversations, during the work process, at special events and at committee meetings. Queries submitted by visitors and researchers and questions arising during exhibitions and other projects constantly prompted members of the DÖW team to respond with first-hand information and points of view, thus offering a rich fund of personal experience from which I have also constantly profited.

The great diversity of experience possessed by this founding generation has effectively prevented the work of the DÖW (and my own work) from being restricted to the politically organized resistance and the repression of political opponents, nor has the scope of its or my work ever been limited by any particular political standpoint. On the contrary, the goal has always been to document all forms of resistance and NS persecution. In spite of repeated extreme right-wing and in particular FPÖ allegations that the DÖW is ‘communist’ or ‘extreme left-wing’, the DÖW has always been and continues to be governed by a spirit of openness and pluralism, which has been manifested not only in the cross-party composition of the governing board but also in the DÖW’s actual work. Although I personally have a clearly defined political position, I have always striven to reflect the impartiality and cross-party character of the DÖW in my own work.

Accordingly, the present book has been written on the basis of the DÖW’s broad definition of resistance, which will be given closer consideration below. As a result, accounts are given not only of all resistance groups and currents, including small religious groups and small groups of political dissidents, but also of forms of resistance and opposition outside the narrower political sphere.

As the quantity and quality of the resistance and the courage and commitment of resistance activists can only be appreciated in the light of a full presentation of the machinery of Nazi repression and of the measures it implemented, Chapter II describes the Gestapo, the Nazi judicial system, the concentration camps and other instruments of persecution. In writing this chapter, I endeavoured to reflect recent research findings on the victims of the National Socialist (NS) judicial system and of political and racial persecution.

Against this background, which is made up not only of Nazi terror but also of Nazi ideology's penetration of broad sections of the population, Chapters V–XVIII present a survey of the groups and groupings that put up resistance to the Nazi regime in the years 1938–1945 and also, as noted above, of other forms of opposition during those years. The range of resistance groups and forms of resistance was wide: the Socialists, the Communists and other left-wing organizations (Chapters V–VII); the Christian, conservative and monarchist camps (VIII–X); resistance by Jews (XI); Austrians in exile (XII); commando units mounted by the Allies (XIII); the Partisans, particularly the Carinthian Slovenes (XIV); resistance in the military (XV), including desertions, the assassination attempt on Hitler of 20 July 1944, and actions in April/May 1945; cross-party groups such as 'O5' (XVI); resistance in the concentration camps (XVII); and, finally (XVIII), a great variety of forms of resistance offered by innumerable single individuals, including assistance to Jews and other persecuted groups, 'subversive' utterances, listening to foreign broadcasts, and non-conformist behaviour on the part of young people. Throughout the book and in the final chapter (XIX) the actual results and the value of the resistance are assessed with reference to the reminder to Austria issued by the Allies in the Moscow Declaration of 1943 that 'in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her [Austria's] own contribution to her liberation.' In order to ensure that the book offers more than just a long list of descriptions of organizations and offences against the regime, I have given somewhat fuller accounts of the lives of certain outstanding personalities from the Austrian resistance such as Karl Roman Scholz, Franz Jägerstätter and Herbert Eichholzer. Furthermore, in order to give the various resistance groups and forms of resistance a more human face, I decided to include numerous examples of individual acts of resistance and to accompany them with concise biographical details, although I knew that in so doing I would inevitably be doing an injustice to the many other resistance activists not mentioned by name. Finally, the survey also includes an account of the hitherto little-known area of Austrian resistance to the Nazi 'euthanasia' programme (XVIII.11 and VIII.3). In order to bring the reader closer to the reality of the resistance struggle, I have also quoted liberally from important archival sources.

The scope of the present publication did not allow me to deal with all aspects of the Austrian resistance in the detail they deserve. It was, for example, only possible to devote a short chapter (IV) to the geographical dimension; in this connection I would refer the reader to the documentations published by the DÖW on resistance and persecution in six of the nine Austrian federal provinces.³ Furthermore, the numerous resistance activities and groups amongst the hundreds of thousands of forced labourers, prisoners of war

and other foreigners who were deported to Austria have only been dealt with insofar as they are connected with the Austrian resistance. Although the scope of the present book does not extend to cover the resistance put up by various political groupings to the Corporate State ('Ständestaat') in the years from 1933/34 to 1938 ('Austrofascism'),⁴ my accounts of certain resistance groups have necessarily had to include the occasional flashback to these years. On account of the lack of preparatory research and of the very complexity of the subject, I have also not attempted to go into the psycho-social preconditions for the resistance.

My sincere thanks go to all who have helped me in the writing of this book, especially my colleagues from the DÖW: the archivists Dr. Elisabeth Klamper and Dr. Ursula Schwarz, the librarians Willi Skalda and Mag. Stephan Roth, and the academic director Univ. Doz. Mag. Dr. Brigitte Bailer, whose assistance has enabled me to make full use of the DÖW infrastructure. The extensive collection of biographical material relating to the Vienna Gestapo's 'Identification Card-Index' ('Erkennungsdienstliche Kartei') compiled by the DÖW staff member Dr. Christa Mehany, which is accessible on the Internet, provided me with an indispensable source from which I quote frequently. I am grateful to the Archive of the City and Federal Province of Vienna (Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv) and its (then) director Univ. Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Oppl for their generosity during my work on these Gestapo photographs. I would also like to thank the publishing house Edition Steinbauer (Dr. Reingard Grübl-Steinbauer, Heribert Steinbauer) for having enabled me to publish the present book in German in 2008 and for having performed their role as publishers in exemplary fashion. I also owe a debt of thanks to the chairman of the Zukunftsfonds der Republik Österreich ('Future Fund of the Republic of Austria'), Mag. Dr. Kurt Scholz, for having initiated the project of the translation of the 2008 book in a somewhat enlarged edition. Last but not least, I would like to express my thanks to the two translators John Nicholson and Eric Canepa, both for their translation of an often difficult text and also for having made my text clear and comprehensible for the English-speaking readership.

The beginnings of research into the Austrian resistance

The Moscow Declaration made public on 1 November 1943 by the foreign ministers of the three Allied powers – the USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union – contained a 'Declaration on Austria' which pledged the re-establishment of a 'free and independent Austria' but concluded with the

following critical sentence: 'Austria is reminded, however, that she has responsibility which she cannot evade for participation in the war on the side of Hitlerite Germany, and that in the final settlement account will inevitably be taken of her own contribution to her liberation.' Accordingly, at the first state treaty negotiations that began in London in January 1947 the Allies called upon Austria to give proof of her contribution and on 8 February 1947 the Austrian delegation presented a document compiled to complement the Memorandum it had already submitted.⁵ Prior to this the prospect of negotiations had caused the Austrian authorities, on the instructions of the federal government, to engage in a busy search for all kinds of documents and sources of information on resistance and persecution, in order for the proof to be provided.

This process constituted the first rough investigation into and assessment of Austrian resistance to the Nazi regime. The documents collected in the process are now preserved in the Austrian State Archives (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv) and in copy at the DÖW and still constitute an important though not unproblematic source for research and publications in this field. They also provided the basis for the Austrian government's 'Rot-Weiß-Rot-Buch', which appeared in English as the 'Red-White-Red Book: Justice for Austria!'.⁶ The reason why this first volume was destined not to be followed by a second was that the social and political life of post-war Austria was not dominated by former resistance activists and victims of Nazi persecution, but by those who had fought against the Allies in the war (including former National Socialists). As the latter were far greater in number than the 'resisters', they were courted for their votes and party membership by the two government parties ÖVP and SPÖ and from the end of the 1940s, after a short phase of de-Nazification, found themselves reintegrated into Austria's political and social life.⁷ Naturally enough, the former National Socialists had little or no sympathy for the resistance: those who had been active in the resistance were (and sometimes still are) referred to as 'oath-breakers' ('Eidbrecher'), 'traitors' ('Verräter') or 'comrade-murderers' ('Kameradenmörder').⁸ As a result it was no longer politically opportune for the parties to pay any attention to the resistance or to champion those who had taken part in it, let alone seek to ensure that the resisters were properly appreciated or given official honours for their deeds. In a taboo that, it should be noted, applied to the universities and to research as well as to history as taught in schools,⁹ there was not a single publication on the subject in Austria until the end of the 1950s.

The first two, important studies to appear were marked by the mood that had also been created in Austria by the Cold War between formerly allied states. While Otto Molden's anti-Communist stance led him to exclude the Communist resistance from his publication of 1958,¹⁰ Hermann Mitteräcker

put the Communist resistance firmly in the forefront in his publication of 1963.¹¹

The first thorough academic research into Austrian resistance did not take place until the first half of the 1960s, when two different projects (partially staffed by the same historians) were mounted with the goal of making a serious study of the Austrian resistance to the Nazi regime. In both projects the NS judicial records were used as the most important source of material for the documentation and presentation of the resistance, although it was not intended that they should be an object of research in their own right.

The one project was initiated by the Austrian Federal Government in 1962 and was intended to lead to the 'publication of an historical account of Austria's contribution to its own liberation in accordance with the Moscow Declaration' in time for the 1965 twentieth-anniversary celebrations of the restoration of the state of Austria.¹² Responsibility for the project was entrusted to Ludwig Jedlicka, who was later to become the first Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Vienna. Among the historians whom he recruited were two pioneers in the field of research into twentieth-century Austria: Karl Stadler, later to become the first Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Linz, and Herbert Steiner, first director of the DÖW at its founding in 1963.¹³ From the beginning this project made extensive use of the NS judicial records, insofar as they were then accessible; however, although it was agreed that the team should be allowed access to the Gestapo files, this was finally not made possible. The question of the identification by name of persons appearing in the records led to discussions with the Minister of Justice Christian Broda and finally to the decision that the persons concerned should only be referred to by their initials. These considerations and discussions, however, were soon to prove obsolete, as the project, after having progressed so far with the investment of so much time and money, was brought to a *de facto* close when the grand coalition of ÖVP and SPÖ ended in the spring of 1966. There was clearly little interest in the project in the ÖVP as the sole party of government and the book could not be published for lack of financial subsidy.¹⁴ As the project was not officially terminated, the NS judicial records were not made available to other researchers until very much later.¹⁵

In parallel with the government operation, largely the same historians were engaged on a second project, the book series 'Das einsame Gewissen' ('The Lonely Conscience'), which was published by Willi Lorenz and his generally speaking right-wing publishing house, Herold.¹⁶ With the protection of the ministers Broda and Kreisky and with financial support from the social-democratically dominated Theodor Körner Foundation, Karl Stadler, Maria Szecsi and Ludwig Jedlicka prepared publications on the subjects of the

Austrian resistance and the Nazi judicial system. Szecsi and Stadler's *Die NS-Justiz in Österreich und ihre Opfer* of 1962 presented many findings that have now been invalidated by further research, notably with regard to the numbers of victims.¹⁷ An even more problematic aspect of the book lies in the fact, which is documented by Gerhard Oberkofler, that Broda and Kreisky made political interventions in the text while work on the book was in progress. At their request, for example, the section on the Communist resistance was shortened by a quarter. On 13 February 1961, after having looked at the first manuscript draft, Christian Broda wrote a letter to Maria Szecsi demanding that the 'names of the judges and the individuals Senates' be excised and on 11 March repeated the demand in categorical terms: 'The names of the judges must in any case be eliminated from the text.' Kreisky recommended that Communist publications of the time should 'not be used as sources'. It is evident that the demands inherent in these massive interventions were complied with. Fierce criticism soon ensued, in particular with regard to the excising of the names of NS judicial functionaries, with the leading voice being that of Eduard Rabofsky, who in the 1930s had been a Communist resistance fighter and had taken part in the struggle along with Stadler and Broda.¹⁸

Of the further volumes published in the series 'Das einsame Gewissen' two are relevant to the present context: Ludwig Jedlicka's book on the Austrian dimension of the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944 (1965), and Karl Stadler's on Austria 1938–1945 as reflected in the Nazi records (1966);¹⁹ a volume was also planned on resistance in the factories but was never completed. Willi Lorenz's collaboration with the government ministers Kreisky and Broda and with the Theodor Körner Foundation was terminated by the Social Democrats when Herold published a Festschrift to mark the fiftieth birthday of Otto Habsburg, who was at this time a highly controversial public figure.²⁰ To sum up, the first research and book projects dealing with the Austrian resistance and the Nazi judicial system largely failed to come to fruition, principally as a result of political factors.

The contribution of the DÖW to research on the Austrian resistance

It was only after the foundation of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance in 1963 and of university faculties of twentieth-century history from 1965 that research into the Austrian resistance began to be conducted on a broader and more systematic basis.²¹ Numerous degree dissertations and doctoral theses were written at the newly created Institutes of Contemporary

History at the universities of Vienna, Linz, Graz, Salzburg, Klagenfurt and Innsbruck. In 1970 the present author began the DÖW project 'Resistance and Persecution in Vienna', which was concluded in 1975 with the publication of a documentational work in three volumes and was followed by similar projects devoted to other federal provinces. In spite of considerable obstacles resulting from data protection and long periods of restricted access to archives, these research projects saw the first sifting through of such NS judicial records as were then accessible, in particular the files on trials before the Special Senates of the Higher Regional Court (Oberlandesgericht, OLG) of Vienna and the various Special Courts (Sondergerichte);²² many of the records were copied and used as the most important source material for the documentation of the resistance and of the prosecutions and repression it provoked.

From the very beginning, the pluralistic structure of the DÖW and its freedom from state or party influence prevented its research into the Austrian resistance from suffering from politically motivated restrictions (as had been the case in both West and East Germany and initially in Austria); as a result, the archiving and evaluation process took account of the whole political spectrum of the Austrian resistance and also, at a very early stage, of the wide range of forms of non-organized resistance and oppositional behaviour. In these endeavours the DÖW adhered to the understanding of 'resistance' formulated by Karl Stadler in the following words: 'In view of the demand for total obedience made by those in power and of the kind of punishments imposed on those who did not comply, every kind of opposition in the Third Reich must be regarded as an act of resistance, even acts by single individuals simply intent on "remaining decent people".'²³ According to the NS Victims Welfare Act (Opferfürsorgegesetz) of 1945 and 1947 the term 'victim' in connection with 'resistance' was to be understood in the sense of 'victims of the struggle for a free and democratic Austria ... who engaged in armed fighting for an independent, democratic Austria and an Austria aware of its historical task, or committed themselves unqualifiedly through words and deeds, in particular against the ideas and goals of National Socialism.' This definition clearly could not provide a proper foundation for our research, as it would have excluded large parts of the Austrian resistance: acts of assistance to persecuted Jews undertaken at risk of life and limb, for example, or religiously motivated resistance.

The series 'Widerstand und Verfolgung' ('Resistance and Persecution') has to date seen the publication of thirteen large volumes on Vienna, Burgenland, Upper Austria, Tyrol, Lower Austria and the federal province of Salzburg, which incorporate important contributions to resistance research on the part of numerous Austrian university scholars and local historians. Questions concerning the distinction between resistance and opposition and between

‘asocial’ forms of behaviour and criminality are dealt with in the introductions to these volumes. The present publication does not deal with these questions or with the problems related to the theory and method of resistance research; for discussions of these themes the reader is referred to a number of other publications.²⁴

It was to a large extent the systematic sorting and analysis of resistance sources (in particular the Gestapo files and judicial records) carried out by the DÖW that made it possible for the American-based historian Radomir Luza, who had himself been a resistance fighter in Czechoslovakia, to compose his impressive comprehensive survey of the Austrian resistance.²⁵ As a result of the limitations of his concept of resistance, however, Luza excluded large parts of the (non-organized) resistance; in addition, some of his findings are now outdated and require correction or supplementing in the light of more recent research. Rejecting the broad concept generally applied in German and Austrian research, Luza defined resistance as ‘any politically conscious, predominantly clandestine organized activity’.²⁶ In so doing he restricted himself to ‘the Resistance’ as a movement and excluded non-organized resisters and oppositionals from the scope of his study. This limited perspective led, for example, to only a few lines being devoted to such leading figures of the Catholic resistance as Sister Restituta or Franz Jägerstätter and no mention at all being made of Ella Lingens, who was interned at Auschwitz for having given assistance to persecuted Jews and is amongst those recognized by Yad Vashem as ‘Righteous Amongst the Nations’.

In research outside Germany and Austria, resistance was understood (and in many cases is still understood) exclusively in terms of a more or less organized fight against German-fascist occupation (or against occupation by the other Axis powers). An illustration of this tendency is provided by a definition from the pen of Henri Michel, one of the most important French resistance researchers and long-standing President of the International Committee for the History of the Second World War, who formulated it as follows at the first international conference on the history of the European resistance movement in Liège in 1958: ‘The resistance movement is first and foremost a patriotic struggle for the liberation of the fatherland ... The resistance movement is thus also the struggle for freedom and human dignity, against totalitarianism.’²⁷ In other countries too there has been a tendency to cling to the traditional concept limiting ‘resistance’ to political and military activity. M. R. D. Foot, in his 1976 book *Resistance: An Analysis of European Resistance to Nazism 1940 to 1945*, laid the emphasis squarely on military and intelligence or secret service activities, without even touching upon the theme of resistance acts and oppositional behaviour on the part of single individuals.²⁸ It is clear

from the proceedings of the conferences on comparative resistance research organized by the Dutch resistance researcher Ger van Roon in the mid-1980s in Amsterdam that the lectures given on the various countries, partly still couched in a nationalistic and heroicizing style, were concerned with the various forms of political resistance and at the very most extended to considering activities on the periphery of the political resistance (passive resistance, strikes, and the like).²⁹

Almost all of the chapters devoted to individual countries in the collected volume on resistance in Europe published in 2011 by the Freiburg military historian Gerd Ueberschär are also marked by a similar focus on the politically organized and armed resistance.³⁰ As has been noted above, it goes without saying that a patriotic-heroic understanding of ‘resistance’ with its reduction to a (likewise limited) political dimension could not and cannot offer a sound foundation for comprehensive resistance research, particularly with regard to Germany and Austria.

Crisis in resistance research – new stimuli and new research projects

The controversial debates of the late 1980s sparked off by the Waldheim affair that originated in 1985/86 resulted in a generally more frank and critical view of the behaviour of Austrians in the Nazi period. In particular the subject of the involvement of Austrians with National Socialism and their having been accomplices to its crimes was brought into the public sphere, first of all in essays, interviews and plays by writers such as Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek and Josef Haslinger, and then somewhat later in books by historians. All this led to a gradual change in general attitudes in Austria, important milestones in this process being Chancellor Vranitzky’s speech acknowledging the co-responsibility borne by Austrians (1991), the creation of the National Fund for Victims of National Socialism (1995), and the mechanism for compensating forced labourers (‘Zwangsarbeiterentschädigung’, 2001). Although this has been a welcome process, some of its more exaggerated manifestations have been accompanied by a tendency to downplay the Austrian resistance; conversely, however, at least the tactic of over-emphasizing or idealizing the Austrian resistance for political purposes has become a thing of the past. Nevertheless, I do consider that the opposite extreme, that of denying or belittling the resistance, is not only objectively untenable but also fails to do justice to the resisters, both those who lost their lives and also those who survived. Quite apart from these questions, however, the highest priorities of resistance

research remain those of establishing the facts in objective form and presenting the resistance in its overall political and social context.

The two decades following the Waldheim controversy saw a paradigm shift in political and contemporary historical debate in which a change of research orientation was accompanied by an undeniable stagnation in the field of resistance research. In its stead, more research has been oriented towards the Holocaust, the concentration camps, 'Aryanization', the NS euthanasia programme, the identification of those responsible for Nazi crimes, and to the post-war problems related to these fields of investigation. More recent studies, many biographical in character, have been devoted in particular to the Communist resistance, the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944, and to resistance put up by the Jehovah's Witnesses and by Roman Catholics, with the Catholic Church also paying tribute to its long disregarded martyrs in a series of beatifications and canonizations (Sister Restituta, Franz Jägerstätter, Father Jakob Gapp, the parish priest Otto Neururer and others). On the other hand, the enquiry into the Austrian resistance initiated by the Austrian federal government in 2005 and carried out with the participation of historians and contemporary witnesses made it clear that there were still substantial shortcomings and gaps in resistance research.³¹

From the point of view of the DÖW, important new stimuli have been provided by the projects carried out in cooperation with the Philipps University in Marburg (Hesse) on research into and evaluation of the NS judicial system in Austria. Thanks to the complete EDP-supported recording of the legal proceedings against more than six thousand Austrian resistance fighters and activists before the Volksgerichtshof (People's Tribunal, VGH) and the OLGs of Vienna and Graz, researchers now have access to the court files in photocopy or on microfiche and to a considerable amount of statistical material now awaiting due evaluation.³² In the course of these projects it was also possible to obtain many hitherto unknown Gestapo documents, in particular interrogation records and final reports, and fully digitalize the daily reports of the Vienna Gestapo for the period autumn 1938 to spring 1945.³³

In 2008, on the basis of this substantially enlarged fund of sources, the present author published a survey of the various groupings, activities and dimensions of the Austrian resistance entitled 'Der österreichische Widerstand 1938–1945',³⁴ which was updated and enlarged for the present English-language publication. For the first time, it offered reliable data on the overall extent of the resistance and figures indicating the comparative strengths of its component parts. The DÖW database project 'Namentliche Erfassung der Opfer politischer Verfolgung in Österreich 1938–1945' ('Register by Name of the Victims of Political Persecution in Austria 1938–1945'),³⁵ which was completed in 2012

and made available on the Internet in 2013, has generated the first database of the names and basic information concerning all those who lost their lives as a result of their resistance to the Nazi regime (insofar as it was possible to establish these facts). The findings of this project are also reflected in the present publication. Finally, in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Graz, the DÖW has since 2007 been engaged in a further large-scale project on resistance and persecution in Styria; a first summary report was presented at a symposium held in 2009.³⁶ Important information on how so many resistance groups were infiltrated and smashed is contained in various publications by the DÖW collaborator Hans Schafranek on the Vienna Gestapo's systematic use of confidential agents or 'V-persons' ('V-Leute' for 'Vertrauensleute', i.e., 'confidence persons' both male and female).³⁷

A number of important projects have been carried out and studies published by researchers outside the DÖW. One study that is particularly valuable in the context of resistance research is the well-founded investigation devoted to the Austrian victims of the military judiciary published in 2003 by the political scientist Walter Manoschek and a team of younger researchers.³⁸ This study provides the first comprehensive presentation of resistance on the part of Austrians serving in the Wehrmacht. The acts of resistance were many in number and took a great variety of forms; in particular, by taking account of acts of resistance by ordinary soldiers, the study makes it clear that although officers had been given greater credit in previous studies, they in fact only formed a small minority of the total number of resisters in the Wehrmacht.

Finally, mention should be made of Peter Pirker's outstanding study of the Austrian activities of the British wartime secret service agency SOE (Special Operations Executive),³⁹ especially as it considers a number of fundamental questions related to the Austrian resistance that go far beyond the scope of the book's actual subject. All these important recent studies have been taken into consideration in the present publication.