

VIENNA MENACED BUT NOT DOOMED

PAUL STEFAN

THE present state of music in Germany raises definite questions about conditions in Vienna, the next objective in the Nazi drive. Has art there, particularly its music, taken a turn for the worse; is the city no longer a refuge for German artists? What will happen if the Nationalist Socialists conquer Vienna, either from without or from within? Let me try to answer these questions to the best of my knowledge.

Since the moment of triumph for National Socialism in Germany, its Austrian followers have made every effort to seize power here, either with a real "Anschluss" or by an alliance in "Gleichschaltung," as in Danzig. The Austrian rulers have energetically defended themselves and fought for the independence of Austria. The country had the best press in the world until the armed revolt in February. The Social Democrats, who were not active enough against the National Socialists even before this revolution, played an unfortunate and not very astute role in Austrian politics. It is to be regretted that now, completely prostrated by the catastrophe, and in despair, small groups are going over to the National Socialists, while the exiles try to incite those who have remained behind to illegal political activities and are waging a war of propaganda against the government.

The Austrian National Socialists, though not very strong in Vienna, are not to be despised in the provinces. The Austrian Catholic dictatorship declares that it can rely only on the regular and volunteer army. Nevertheless it calls on the whole Austrian population, without exception, for aid and maintenance of an "independent and Christian" Austria. Disregarding disagreement on details, it is obvious that if the government is not successful the alternatives are National Socialism or Bolshevistic chaos.

This is the preliminary answer to questions regarding Austria and only in this connection can the statement which follows be understood: in spite of all attempts, neither reaction in art nor anti-semitism of the Nazi type has been established in important matters. Music this winter ran a fairly untroubled course, somewhat livelier than usual. The opera had a few evenings of exceptional splendor. Good concerts were held, great works were presented, all the international stars were included and especially those banned in Germany today; for example, Huberman, who is a favorite here and plays several times a season to sold-out houses, Morini, Fritz Busch as conductor, the Busch Quartet with its leader, Adolph. Bruno Walter conducted various concerts, each received with acclaim, and, after a lapse of twenty-one years, has just revived a series of ten concerts in the Staatsoper again. He gave two works, completely rearranged by him, and received a great ovation. The Staatsoper now has, including the Director Clemens Krauss, four permanent directors, three of whom are barred in Germany because of their descent. Klemperer, as good as excluded from Germany, directed concerts here. Splendid German conductors born in Vienna, like Paul Breisach and Carl Bamberger, have carried on concert activities, although they have no permanent positions.

A far more troublesome problem is the corollary situation, the continued employment in Vienna of German artists who are openly allied with National Socialism and even have taken part in anti-Austrian demonstrations abroad. In general no recognized artist is molested because of his political belief, so long as he creates no issues. So far only the most essential restrictions have been ordered, and they apply to all foreign artists.

All this has happened without any feeling of enmity even against modern Germany. Great figures still receive the same reverence. Richard Strauss and Furtwängler, for example, although both have taken official positions in National Socialist Germany, have also come to terms with the government. It is also worthy of notice that the conductor Schuricht, still active in many parts of Germany, was a successful guest conductor here, and that, just as earlier in his career, he presented Mahler and received a demonstrative ovation. Mahler is proscribed in Ger-

many, despite the fact that Richard Strauss, even Hitler himself, have paid tribute to his artistic sincerity and his integrity. But in Austria he is continually performed and enthusiastically greeted. No one would think of fleeing as they do in Germany from Mendelssohn or Meyerbeer. When Schuricht, who is being considered for a permanent position in Vienna, conducted a Mahler symphony, the Minister of Public Instruction attended.

This applies to all attempts to force the artistic policy of Austria into more reactionary channels. There is of course a certain amount of circumspection, for there is no desire to give the National Socialists material for agitation. When, for example, modern music became more and more involved with the highly inflammatory, although talented texts of Bert Brecht and the like, and gave us "Lehrstücke" that were transparent propaganda for communism, the works immediately became "unsuitable" for Austria.

As far as cultural reaction and anti-semitism are concerned, the responsible authorities have no easy task. There are always disgruntled people, and everywhere, even under the present regime, people who would like to have the positions occupied by others, including Jews. It is necessary to fight the fanatics in the provinces. There are counsellors that would have the government steal a march on the National Socialists and proscribe intellectuals and artists of Jewish descent. In several professions and especially in art, the proportion of Jews has been large, and still is more or less so, for Vienna has always been a Mecca for artists of Jewish descent from Eastern Europe. All this explains the anti-semitic agitation. This should be remembered outside of Austria, and not too much credulity should be given to the claims of critics of the present regime in Austria that there is not much to choose between the Austrian and the Hitler government because they both try to suppress the Jews. There are, after all, still a few fundamental differences.

No one can be delighted with everything that has happened in Austria since February, cultural developments included. But at the very worst, conditions are still better than they are in Germany. When we meet people from Germany, we realize how far we have to go before their situation is reached. In order to

be really free, art needs a certain freedom in the environment. The example of the Italians proves that this is not necessarily synonymous with democracy. We have seen music festivals and exhibitions in Italy that would be impossible in Germany. At all such recent demonstrations of Italian art, the spokesmen of the Italian government have announced that Fascism is not to be confused with cultural reaction. This needs to be said to the rulers of Austria frequently and vigorously, to counteract the influence of Nationalist Socialist agitation.

Should all resistance fail, and Vienna finally, through conquest or by undermining, become the prey of the Nationalist Socialists, the unique position of the city would immediately be shattered, if not irrevocably ruined at least for the duration of this age, and probably longer. The desert of words that Germany has become, would swallow Vienna. The lively life of art which we have preserved, which we proudly defend, and still desire to prolong, would be forever impossible. Vienna would cease to be the magnet for West and East, for the South and for the North that is not the German Reich—and even thousands, if not millions of “Reich Germans” would be robbed of their last hope, not only in politics but in art. It requires no prophet to foretell that Vienna would practically yield its place to the upsurging and important city of Prague. Let us hope that this will not happen, that in all essentials Vienna will remain what it is. The debacle would be worse than Germany's, and Europe—even the whole world—would be irretrievably affected.