

Introduction

In recent years radical forms of anti-Zionism have once more revived with a vengeance in Europe and other parts of the world. Since the hate-fest at the UN-sponsored Durban Conference of September 2001 against racism, the claim that Israel is an “apartheid” state which practices “ethnic cleansing” against Palestinians has become particularly widespread. Such accusations are frequently heard today on European and North American campuses, in the media, the churches, among intellectuals and even among parts of the Western political elite. They have been given additional respectability in a polemical and tendentious book by former US President Jimmy Carter, one of the main architects of the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement in 1979.

Unfortunately Israel finds itself pilloried today as a state based on racism, colonialism, apartheid and even “genocide”. These accusations are now much more widespread than in the mid 1970s when the United Nations passed its notorious resolution equating Zionism with racism. At the same time, Palestinian hostility to Zionism, the escalation of terrorism and open antisemitism in the wider Arab-Muslim world has been greatly envenomed. However the seeds of this development were already present thirty years ago and indeed go back as far as the 1920s.

What has changed is not so much the ideology but the fact that the culture of hatred among many Muslims has been greatly amplified by modern technologies and means of mass communication. Islamic fundamentalism and “holy war” have found an ever more fertile terrain in a backward, crisis-ridden Muslim world of Islamist jihad with anti-Americanism, hatred for Israel and continual media incitement steadily bringing the Middle East to the brink of the apocalypse.

Hence it is particularly important at the present time to understand the meaning and mobilizing power of “anti-Zionism” as well as its links to the Palestinian cause. At its heart lies the ideological negation of Jewish nationhood. However, one of the confusing factors in appreciating the discriminatory and dangerous consequences of this ideological anti-Zionism has been the prominent role played by Jewish intellectuals and political militants in its propagation. Jewish anti-Zionism has indeed a long pedigree. But since 1948 its implications have significantly changed. Today the implementation of its ideas would signify the

dismantlement of a Jewish state which is home to more than five million Jews and a focal point of world-wide Jewish identity. Nonetheless, tensions in the relations between Judaism and Zionism, or concerning Israel and the Diaspora, the secular or religious foundations of Jewish identity, the role of the Left in promoting anti-Zionism (and/or antisemitism) and the Israel-Palestinian conflict stubbornly refuse to go away. On the contrary, these issues are once again hotly debated. Now, more than ever, they remain a source of contention among Jews and non-Jews alike.

In order to obtain a deeper historical perspective with regard to this debate it is especially illuminating to reexamine certain historical antecedents that go back to the 1970s. The political career of Bruno Kreisky, Austria's Federal Chancellor between 1970 and 1983, provides an invaluable touchstone for such a discussion. He was the first Socialist and Jew to obtain such an exalted position in Austria; he was the only Jewish politician to ever rule a German-speaking nation, which he did, without ever losing an election. Kreisky proved in many respects to be a pioneer in forming European attitudes to the Palestinian Question. He was also one of the first statesmen to confront all the thorny questions relating to Zionism, antisemitism, the Holocaust and Jewish identity which still haunt us today. This ACTA reconstructs the contradictions, ambivalences and policy decisions which characterized Kreisky's handling of these highly sensitive issues - an anti-Zionist approach which uncannily anticipated that which still prevails among much of the liberal and leftist intelligentsia in the Western world today.

ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM: THE CASE OF BRUNO KREISKY

Bruno Kreisky was Chancellor of Austria for thirteen years, steering the Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ) to unprecedented electoral triumphs in the period between 1970 and 1983. Thanks to his pragmatism, shrewdness, and personal popularity, the Socialists convinced a traditionally conservative electorate that they could manage a modern capitalist society more efficiently and democratically than their political rivals. There were parallel successes in Sweden, West Germany Britain and France, but rarely did one leader dominate his party and national politics as much as Kreisky during the years of his ascendancy.

His remarkable political success was achieved despite his cosmopolitan, *grossbürgerlich* Jewish background. Unlike Victor Adler and Otto Bauer, his best-known Jewish forerunners as leaders of the Socialist movement, it is true that Kreisky was spared the vicious antisemitic invective which accompanied their political activity.¹ Nevertheless, the “Jewish Question” did not disappear from postwar Austrian life. There is a story told by former Austrian President, Rudolf Kirschlager, which illustrates its persistence and Kreisky’s own awareness of it. At a meeting of SPÖ leaders in 1967, shortly before the election of a new Party Chairman, Kirschlager noticed the heavy gold cufflinks Kreisky was wearing, inscribed with his initials BK. Teasingly he asked whether Kreisky was already expecting to become Federal Chancellor (*Bundeskanzler* or BK for short!). Kreisky shot back: “Come on, you don’t believe they’re going to elect a Jew to be Chancellor.”²

Although Kreisky always asserted that the “Jewish question” had no *personal* significance for him, his emotional reactions to Israel and Zionism frequently contradicted this claim. In his own self-perception, things were clear. He was an assimilated, *konfessionslos* (non-denominational) Jew. For him there was no living reality to Judaism or to the Jewish people.³ In this respect, Kreisky was a disciple of the Austro-Marxist tradition developed by Karl Kautsky and Otto Bauer. Before 1914 they had argued that Jews lacked a common territory or language. Hence, they could not be considered a national group entitled to

¹ See Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds.), *The Kreisky Era in Austria* (New Brunswick), London 1994. On Victor Adler and Otto Bauer, see Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews. The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (London 1982), 232-61, 332-48.

² Herbert Pierre Sacher, “Kreisky and the Jews”, in Bischof and Pelinka (eds.), *The Kreisky Era*, *Ibid*, p. 29.

³ Bruno Kreisky, *Die Zeit in der wir leben: Betrachtungen zur internationalen Politik* (Vienna, Munich, Innsbruck 1989), 59 ff.

national autonomy, let alone have the right to an independent state.⁴ Kautsky and Otto Bauer were aware that over 5 million non-assimilated Jews lived around 1900 in the Russian Pale of Settlement with most of the attributes of a distinct people—in their own minds and that of the surrounding peoples.

However, the Austro-Marxists, like the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie in Central Europe, firmly believed that the Jewish masses of the Pale would be integrated into mainstream European society. They looked to the classless Utopia envisaged by Socialism to bring Jewish history and Judaism to its final end. The young Kreisky certainly sympathized with this perspective embraced by Otto Bauer, whom he regarded as his spiritual mentor. At the same time, after 1948, he could not ignore the existence of an independent Jewish state in the Middle East, a reality not anticipated by the Austro-Marxists.⁵

The charismatic idea of Socialism had framed Kreisky's personal and political world ever since 1927, when he was still only sixteen years old. It was more than simply the theory of historical materialism or a doctrine of class-war. Marxian Socialism became for Kreisky a secular religion defining a moral commitment to serve the cause of the proletariat. It held out the universalist promise of a new world and a classless society in which mankind would be redeemed irrespective of race, religion, or nationality.⁶

Otto Bauer, the leader of Austrian socialism between 1918 and 1938 laid the ideological foundations for Kreisky's assimilationist credo, denying that the "Jewish nationality" had any future in the modern world.⁷ Bauer was persuaded that with the disappearance of their special economic function as traders and moneylenders, Jews would cease to have any distinct identity.⁸ At the same time he actively opposed not only to Zionism but independent Jewish schools, the teaching of Yiddish and the demands of East European Jewry for cultural-national autonomy.⁹

Otto Bauer rationalized this position by asserting that the Jews were a "historyless" people, who had stood for centuries outside the mainstream of

⁴ See Wistrich, *Socialism*, 151-57 on Kautsky and the latter's pamphlet, *Rasse und Judentum* (Berlin 1914), as well as Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna 1907), 376 ff.

⁵ See, for instance, his revealing remarks in a long interview with the French left-wing weekly, "Bruno Kreisky et les Juifs," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 Apr. 1979, 119 ff., where he evokes the Austro-Marxists; also the highly critical comments of Nathan Rothenstreich, "A Working Politician and What is Beyond Him," *Forum* (Fall/Winter 1979): 1-10.

⁶ Josef Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism* (New York, 1954), 80-81, on the appeal of socialism to many Austrian Jews: "The charismatic idea of socialism superseded the faith of the fathers."

⁷ Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna 1907), 376.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

European civilization. He dismissed their traditions as outmoded, their religion as obscurantist, branding their social psychology as corrupt and money-centered. The task of Social Democracy was to encourage the Jewish worker to strip off his negative “ghetto” identity, abandon his Jewish characteristics and adapt to his “Christian class-comrade.” This radically assimilationist view of Jewish life was in the classical tradition of Marxism but coming from a Jew it had an extra sting. Cultural individuality and national self-determination might be desirable for Slavic nationalities like the Poles, Czechs or Yugoslavs but it became “reactionary” and harmful as soon as Jewish national autonomy was involved. This was to be the dogmatic view subsequently adopted by Bruno Kreisky.

Although the Social Democrats secured firm control of the municipal administration in Vienna by the 1920s, they were constantly on the defensive with regard to the “Jewish question.” The socialist tradition in Austria, never philosemitic, identified Jews with banking, capitalist enterprise, and profiteering. Otto Bauer and his colleagues persisted after the First World War in using the same hollow slogans about antisemitism which had failed to prevent the Christian-social demagogue, Dr. Karl Lueger, from ruling Vienna between 1897 and 1910. The Social Democrats were still arguing in the 1920s as they had done 30 years earlier, that they had no obligation to defend Jewish capital—which was true but irrelevant.¹⁰ In a speech in Parliament on 6 July 1926, Robert Danneberg, the prominent left-wing deputy and close friend of Otto Bauer, described the Christian Socials as pseudo-antisemites conducting a mock war against Jewish finance, designed to hoodwink the masses.¹¹ In practice, as soon as capitalist interests were threatened, Jewish and “Aryan” bankers and industrialists would close ranks against the labor movement.¹² Danneberg illustrated his thesis by alleging that wealthy Jewish bankers were financing the priest Ignaz Seipel and his ruling Christian Social party. In the eyes of Danneberg, the real representatives of Jewish interests were the clerical party! This grossly misleading statement, applied at best to a tiny handful of Jewish manufacturers and bankers like Mandl and Sieghart. It was a transparent socialist attempt to brand antisemites with the “Jewish” stigma. The fact that Danneberg was himself Jewish made it particularly distasteful.

¹⁰ For Austro-Marxist views on the Jews and antisemitism after 1918, see J. Hannak, “Das Judentum am Scheidewege,” *Der Kampf*, 12 (1919): 619 ff.; “Die Judenfrage. Der Antisemitismus in der Theorie und in der Praxis,” *Sozialdemokratisches Wahlhandbuch*, no. 10 (1923); and Christoph Hinteregger, *Der Judenschwindel* (Vienna 1923).

¹¹ Robert Danneberg, *Die Schiebergeschäfte der Regierungsparteien. (Der Antisemitismus im Lichte der Thatsachen)* (Vienna 1926), 11, 17-18.

¹² Jack Jacobs, “Austrian Social Democracy and the Jewish Question,” in *The Austrian Socialist Experiment 1918-1934*, ed. by Anson Rabinbach (Boulder, Colo. 1985) 157-66.

Bruno Kreisky entered the labor movement one year after Danneberg's speech which had been much applauded by his parliamentary comrades. He personally witnessed the violent assault by Austrian police in 1927 against protesting workers in front of the Ministry of Justice. Kreisky was instantly "politicized" by this dramatic event which provoked many deaths. He joined the Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend (Socialist Workers Youth), becoming actively involved in organizing young proletarians. By 1933—at the age of twenty-two—he was appointed chairman of the National Committee for Educational Development within the Austrian socialist youth organizations. Following Otto Bauer's advice he began to study law, eventually obtaining a university degree, before he was forced out of Austria by the *Anschluss*.

Since the early 1930s, the young Kreisky had experienced Austrian Nazi agitation at first hand, mainly on university campuses. He himself was arrested in January 1935, accused of engaging in illegal underground activity. In the prisons of the authoritarian Catholic *Ständestaat* he would encounter Nazis, under arrest, like himself, as so-called "illegals." Some of these Austrian National Socialists were of proletarian origin. He vainly sought to convince them that antisemitism was primarily a tactical weapon of fascist movements to deflect responsibility for working-class misery, away from the capitalist exploiters.

Kreisky was again imprisoned after March 1938 by the triumphant Nazis, but was fortunate enough to be released, thanks to a former cellmate and Hitler admirer, whom he had once assisted in prison. This fellow prisoner, a "typical antisemitic petit-bourgeois youth" saved him from the clutches of the Gestapo and deportation to a concentration camp. On 8 August 1938 the 27 year old Bruno Kreisky was freed and permitted to leave for Sweden.

Imprisonment in the 1930s led the young socialist émigré to distinguish sharply between the "small Nazis" for whom he had some empathy, and the brutal power-seeking elites. Nazis and Social Democrats in the 1930s seemed to have a *common enemy*—namely the "Austro-fascist" State. As a revolutionary Marxist in those years, Kreisky felt that the origins of the Austrian tragedy lay in the 1934 anti-socialist *putsch* carried out by the Catholic Social leader, Engelbert Dollfuss. By comparison, the Nazi conquest of 1938 was a much less dramatic rupture for the Social Democratic party.

The young Kreisky did not regard National Socialism as much more than a passing symptom of capitalist crisis. Equally, antisemitism was treated as relatively unimportant. Kreisky would always emphasize that before 1938 he was politically persecuted (*politisch verfolgt*) rather than victimized for racial reasons (*rassisch verfolgt*). This was a distinction which would come to have considerable importance in postwar Austria.

No less significant was the emphasis in Kreisky's memoirs on the "innocence" of the Austrian masses in the rise of Nazism. To a large extent he

would exculpate them from any guilt or personal involvement in the Holocaust. Hence he passed lightly over the scenes of jubilation in the Heldenplatz (March 1938), insisting that the great majority of Austrians never became convinced Nazis. By the same token he inflated the level of anti-Nazi feelings and political protest in his Austrian homeland—including even passive bystanders in the flattering category of “resisters.”

It is intriguing to observe how Kreisky highlighted his Austrianness at the expense of his Jewish identity. It allowed him to ignore the unpleasant fact that being a Jew in Austria after March 1938 had virtually become a death sentence. As a political resister, he could claim to exercise free choice and remain an autonomous individual. Hence, when he returned to Austria after the war, it was not as a “Jew” but as an anti-fascist Austrian Social Democrat. For Kreisky the memory of the Holocaust was relegated to little more than a historical traffic-accident. Indeed, he resumed his post-war political activity where things had left off in 1934, as if the Shoah never happened. Nazism was merely a passing interlude.¹³

The Austrian socialist party was reconstituted in 1945 after eleven years of illegality. Most of its former Jewish leaders were either dead, ailing, or growing old. Of those who were in exile, only a handful would ever to return from England, America, and Sweden. They were hardly welcomed with open arms. In the first place, new cadres had arisen, steeled in the period of occupation and resistance, who tended to resent the Old Guard—those socialists in exile who had never directly experienced Nazi rule between 1939 and 1945.

Moreover, there was a significant current of working-class antisemitism which had been encouraged by the National Socialists after 1938. This is important since Kreisky's own background was hardly proletarian. His *grossbürgerlich* parents and ancestors came from the Czech part of Habsburg Austria. His father had been the director of a textile factory and his mother the daughter of an industrialist.¹⁴ This class background did not exactly help Kreisky's political prospects as a Socialist leader. However, he derived considerable self-confidence from his family milieu, a marked attachment to the multinational Habsburg Empire of his childhood and a strong sense of Austrian patriotism.

The Viennese-born Kreisky had never received any formal Jewish education from his German-speaking parents although at least one of his grandfathers could read Hebrew. They were highly assimilated Jews, like other

¹³ For Kreisky's years as a young Socialist, see Oliver Rathkolb and Irene Etzendorfer, *Der junge Kreisky. Schriften—Reden—Dokumente 1931-1945* (Vienna and Munich 1986); H. Pierre Secher, *Bruno Kreisky. Chancellor of Austria* (Pittsburgh, Pa. 1993), 1-75, and Kreisky, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 308ff.

¹⁴ Bruno Kreisky, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 49.

members of his close-knit family who came from Bohemia and Moravia. In his memoirs he highlights their *echte Österreichertum* (authentic Austrianism) as faithful servants of the Habsburg State and diligent schoolteachers, officials, and even parliamentary deputies. No less emphatically, he underlined their distance from the Galician *Ostjuden* still living in ghettos and viscerally attached to Jewish religious rituals. In Kreisky's upbeat narrative, none of his ancestors ever suffered any discrimination in Habsburg Austria. He was clearly concerned to show through his own family history that Jews could positively serve the State, the common good, and the fatherland. In other words, assimilation was a rational option whose feasibility his own family history perfectly exemplified. Had not the Kreisky clan *willed* and *accomplished* a genuine social integration?¹⁵

In Kreisky's autobiographical account there was no hint that he had ever experienced any insults, humiliation or discrimination during his adolescent years in Austria. Only when describing the rowdy agitation of Nazi students at the University of Vienna in the early 1930s do we receive a brief glimpse of racist violence. Even then, the rampant antisemitism is described as a German not an Austrian phenomenon. National Socialism is depicted as having been forcefully imposed by a *foreign* invasion from Germany. Austrians, according to the establishment narrative, were the first *victims* of National Socialism. Bruno Kreisky added his own Marxist gloss. The local support which the Nazis enjoyed was primarily the product of economic crisis and the social injustices inflicted by the "Austro-fascist" dictatorship of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg. This self-serving myth is still repeated by many Social Democrats until the present day.

Bruno Kreisky genuinely believed that antisemitism could be overcome if the individual was determined not to feel affected by it. He was convinced that any behavior suggesting Jews were something special—whether in a positive or negative sense – was harmful and counter-productive. Antisemitic *ressentiment*, he suggested, was primarily directed against those who *resisted* assimilation. However, the historical reality of Nazi Germany demonstrated precisely the opposite. Assimilated Jews were Public Enemy Number one. Their efforts at integration proved completely futile. Kreisky seriously underestimated the existential, irrational, and mythical power of Nazi antisemitism. Moreover, his approach implied that the (Jewish) victims of prejudice were ultimately responsible for their own persecution—especially the "caftan Jews"—who unlike Bruno Kreisky had resisted dissolution into the (antisemitic) bourgeois milieu of Vienna.

Throughout his adolescence, these *Ostjuden* were marked out as "the other"

¹⁵ Ibid.

in the eyes of the *grossbürgerlich* Germanized Czech Jews from whom Kreisky originated. They were the lower-class Jews who lived across the Danube Canal in the Leopoldstadt or in the Brigittenau districts.¹⁶ The gulf between the two groups was seemingly unbridgeable. But Kreisky's own prejudices against the non-assimilated *Ostjuden* did not derive solely from his own class and family background. He remained convinced that any distinctive Jewish group identity—religious or national—was historically “reactionary” and responsible for provoking antisemitism.

The Holocaust offered a sharp rebuttal of Kreisky's assimilationist credo. This may explain why references to its monstrous crimes remain astonishingly sparse in his memoirs. It is revealing, for example, that during his war years in Sweden, he ignored reports about the Nazi mass murder of the Jews. At that very time he was heavily involved in helping Austrian Wehrmacht soldiers in Russian captivity to return to their Austrian homeland! Yet millions of his co-religionists were being hunted down like wild animals across the European continent or being sent to the gas chambers.¹⁷ Kreisky showed no interest in their fate.

Swedish exile spared Bruno Kreisky any direct encounter with the horrors of the Holocaust. It was in Stockholm that he married a highly assimilated Swedish Jewish woman from a wealthy industrialist milieu and established his own family. Years later he would emphasize how much closer he felt to Sweden (which he regarded as a “second fatherland”) than to Israel.¹⁸ In Social Democratic Sweden he was greatly impressed by its welfare state policies and the robust civic patriotism which he witnessed. His encounter with the democratic model of the Scandinavian labor movement would profoundly shape Kreisky's socialist outlook. It was in Stockholm too, that he began his diplomatic career as the Austrian representative to the Swedish authorities and first came to appreciate the benefits of “neutrality” in international affairs.

While Kreisky was still in Scandinavia in the late 1940s, fellow Austrian socialists began efforts to recruit Nazi support, rationalizing their lack of principle by talk of “rehabilitation,” “healing old wounds,” and “making a fresh start.” In the provincial Austrian socialist press, there was an unmistakable antisemitic slant, especially on the question of reparations to Jews. No less than in conservative or “liberal” nationalist parties, there was a

¹⁶ See Ruth Beckermann, ed., *Die Marzsesinsek: Juden in der Wiener Leopoldstadt, 1918-1938* (Vienna 1984); and Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jewish Politics in Vienna, 1918-1938* (Bloomington, Ind. 1991).

¹⁷ H. Pierre Secher, *Bruno Kreisky*, 49.

¹⁸ See “Kreisky et les Juifs,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 754 (23-29 Apr. 1979): 134.

strong desire to anaesthetize the Nazi past.¹⁹

When Kreisky was elected chairman of the Socialist party in February 1967, it was paradoxically with the support of the provinces and against the advice of the Viennese party functionaries and trade union chiefs.²⁰ The provinces saw him as the man to lead them out of the ideological “ghetto,” to unite radicals and moderates, and present a credible “modern” alternative to the Conservatives. They regarded him as a symbol of the “Great Coalition.” He had after all served with distinction as Foreign Minister between 1959 and 1966. Moreover, he offered a reformist face for one of the most tradition-bound European labor movements.

Bruno Kreisky paradoxically turned out to be the one leader able to make Socialism *salonfähig* in Catholic Austria. In 1970, he exceeded all expectations and led the Socialists to a majority for the first time in their history.²¹ The diplomat with the soft Viennese accent and the look of a cultured bank director of the interwar period successfully exorcised the ghost of the “Red menace”. Under his leadership, the Socialists even made significant gains among the entrepreneurial middle class and peasant electorate.²² Still, some doubts were in order. Many Jews wondered whether Austria, the cradle of modern political antisemitism, could truly change its spots? Was the election of an atheist “Jewish-born” Socialist as Federal Chancellor, proof that the crimes of the recent past had really been overcome?

Kreisky’s attitude to the shadows of Nazism was tested very soon after he entered office. On 20 April 1970, Dr. Hans Öllinger, the Minister of Agriculture in his Socialist Cabinet, was revealed by “Nazi-hunter” Simon Wiesenthal to have been a former SS lieutenant. Öllinger promptly resigned on his “doctor’s advice.” At a press conference, the new Chancellor vigorously defended Öllinger on the ground that he had never been a concentration camp guard or member of the Waffen-SS. Kreisky added that Öllinger had joined the National Socialists between 1934 and 1938 in the hope of a national revival and had been imprisoned together with Socialists and Communists by the “clerical” fascist dictatorship. According to the new Chancellor, everyone had the right to make a political mistake. Kreisky emphasized that he would not

¹⁹ See Margit Reiter, *Unter Antisemitismus-Verdacht. Die österreichische Linke und Israel nach der Shoah* (Innsbruck, Vienna, and Munich 2001), 21-60.

²⁰ Hanni Könitzer, “Leben bei den österreichischen Sozialisten,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 Dec. 1967.

²¹ Hanni Könitzer, “Die Überraschung in Österreich,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 Mar. 1970.

²² Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi, “Jeder Zoll ein Liberaler,” in *Die Zeit*, 6 Mar. 1970; see Felix Kreissler, “Bruno Kreisky. Aperçu politico-biographique,” *Austriaca* (June 1986): 16-17; and the contributions by Oliver Rathkolb and Anton Pelinka in the same volume, 65-76, 81-90.

hesitate to reappoint Öllinger if necessary. For once, a neo-Nazi paper was not far off the mark when it claimed that Kreisky's principle was *Wer ein Nazi ist, bestimmt die SPÖ!* ("The Austrian Social Democrats decide who is a Nazi")—an allusion to Karl Lueger's cynical dictum around 1900—*Wer ein Jud ist, das bestimme ich* ["I decide who is a Jew."].²³ The new Minister of the Interior, Otto Rosch, who had been arrested as a young man in 1947 on charges of Nazi activities but acquitted for lack of evidence, was another controversial case. Kreisky also defended Rosch, insisting that he intended to ignore the Nazi background of all persons who had been reintegrated into postwar Austrian society. To prove his point he appointed yet another former member of the NSDAP, Dr. Weihs. Kreisky's handling of these appointments was taken as evidence by many that he intended "to be a Chancellor of all Austrians."²⁴

Thus an extraordinarily bizarre situation had arisen. The first Socialist of Jewish ancestry to head an Austrian government was presiding over the only cabinet in Europe which included such a high number of ex-Nazis. Against this background, the feud of the Austrian Socialist government with Simon Wiesenthal after 1970 becomes clearer. The Vienna Documentation Centre run by Wiesenthal appeared to Kreisky, and indeed to most Austrians bent on forgetting the past, like a festering sore from a bygone age. The new Chancellor did not disguise his anger at Wiesenthal for having reminded Austrians of the blackest hole in their history. In the summer of 1970 he described him with contempt as a "Jewish fascist" and drove home the barb by remarking: "Happily one finds reactionaries also amongst us Jews, as well as thieves, murderers and prostitutes."²⁵ Another Socialist leader, Leopold Grätz, Mayor of Vienna and a former Minister of Education, added his own barely veiled threat—accusing Wiesenthal of creating "a private police and informers' organization". He alleged that there was a "grotesque alliance" between Wiesenthal and the clerical Conservatives (ÖVP) as well as the Neo-Nazi *Deutsche Nationalzeitung*.²⁶ The Kreisky government, so it seemed, was looking for a pretext to close down the Jewish Documentation Centre.

It is difficult today to imagine the unpopularity of Simon Wiesenthal in a

²³ Franz Kirchberger, "Kreisky in der NS-Falle," *Deutsche Wochenzeitung*, 29 May 1970.

²⁴ *New York Times*, 2 June 1970; see also Robert S. Wistrich, "The Strange Case of Bruno Kreisky," *Encounter* (May 1979): 78-85, and "The Kreisky Phenomenon: A Reassessment," in *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Robert S. Wistrich (New York 1992), 234-51.

²⁵ "Besorgnis über Dokumentationszentrum," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 July 1970.

²⁶ Grätz described Wiesenthal's Centre as a "Feme- und Spitzelorganisation." The Moscow Communist youth organ *Konsomolskaya Pravda* was more specific: it alleged that Wiesenthal was running an Israeli espionage centre supported by the CIA and the British secret service.

country where de-Nazification had remained skin-deep.²⁷ There had been an astonishing number of acquittals and mild sentences passed on war criminals in Austria since it regained its national independence in 1955.²⁸ Thus Kreisky could reasonably assume that his attack on an implacable pursuer of Nazi war criminals (who was a Polish Jew to boot) would do no harm to his popularity with the Austrian electorate. On the contrary, it reinforced his image as a patriotic Austrian. So, too, did the crisis centered on Schoenau castle, in lower Austria, a transit point for Jewish emigrants permitted to leave the USSR and other East European countries—many of whom subsequently went on to Israel. On 28 September 1973 three Russian Jews were taken hostage by armed Palestinians who had boarded a train from the East carrying emigrants at the Austrian border crossing. The terrorists insisted that their hostages be exchanged for Palestinians held by Israel. They also demanded the closure of Schoenau Castle and the cessation of all Russian Jewish emigration through Austria.

Within a few hours Kreisky managed to secure the release of the hostages. The terrorists were flown out of the country without any blood being spilt, and the Chancellor agreed to close Schoenau Castle down, though Soviet Jewish emigration continued to transit through Austria. Kreisky's decision was sharply criticized at the time in Israel and in the West though his decision was widely approved in Austria.²⁹ One reason for public satisfaction was that the Chancellor insisted he did not want Austria to become the scene of armed confrontations between Israel and the Arabs. Moreover, he had avoided a massacre like that at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, when German sharpshooters miserably botched an attempt to rescue Israeli athletes taken hostage by Palestinian terrorists. Nevertheless, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir was shocked by Kreisky's "capitulation" rushing to Vienna in early October 1973 to try and reverse the decision of the Austrian Chancellor. Legend has it that Kreisky refused her even a glass of water. Tragically, Israel

²⁷ "Problematik der Naziprozesse in Österreich," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 15 Aug. 1972.

²⁸ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 July 1970; also a letter by Wiesenthal addressed to friends of his Centre abroad, dated 16 June 1970. See Ingrid Böhler, "'Wenn die Juden ein Volk sind, so ist es ein mieses Volk.' Die Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal Affäre 1975," in *Politische Affäre und Skandale in Österreich*, ed. by Hubert Sickinger (Vienna and Munich 1996), 502-31; Herline Koelbl, *Jüdische Portraits* (Frankfurt a.M. 1989); and Ruth Wodak et al., *Wir sind alle unschuldige Täter*, *Diskurshistorische Studien zum Nachkriegsantisemitismus* (Frankfurt a.M. 1990). On the Wiesenthal Affair as a whole, see Martin van Amerongen, *Kreisky und seine unbewältigte Gegenwart* (Graz, Vienna, and Köln 1977); Paul Blau, "Das Nazi-Dilemma der SPÖ," in *Wer war Bruno Kreisky?*, ed. by Franz Richard Reiter (Vienna 2000), 41-51.

²⁹ H. Pierre Secher, *Bruno Kreisky*, 153-57. Western media reaction at the time was one of shock and indignation that Kreisky had "capitulated" to terrorist demands. Israelis were particularly angry at his apparent pliancy.

would shortly afterwards be taken by surprise as the Egyptians and Syrians launched the Yom Kippur War to destroy the Jewish state. Golda Meir would never forgive Kreisky for his coolly detached, “neutral” position in this conflict and his barely disguised hostility to Zionism.

This antipathy had its roots in his dismissal of Judaism as the fossilized ghetto offshoot of a dispersed ethno-religious group lacking any national characteristics.³⁰ Only antisemitic persecution had, in his view, preserved any measure of artificial unity among the diverse branches of the “Jewish people.” According to Kreisky, there was nothing in common between the highly acculturated Jews of America and Western Europe, the Ashkenazic *Ostjuden*, or the Sephardic masses from Islamic lands. At best one could define the Jews as a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*—a “community of fate”—a term borrowed from Otto Bauer, which was also widely used by the Nazis. But Kreisky was emphatic that Jews were *not* a world-wide people as Zionists claimed. Indeed, the concept of Jewish peoplehood remained anathema to Kreisky, evoking as it did, the specter of dual loyalties. The Austrian Chancellor’s repeated efforts to equate Zionism with the Nazi fiction of a “Jewish race” was a symptom of how threatening the idea of a Jewish nation had become.³¹

Ignoring the fact that mainstream Jewish nationalism was far removed from racial thinking, Kreisky charged Zionists with “anthropological mysticism,” or a “mysterious racism in reverse.” He even claimed that Zionism had embraced the *Blut und Boden* (Blood and soil) mythology of the Third Reich.³² Disregarding the historical continuity of the Jewish people, its religious vocation, and national self-understanding, Kreisky fell back on categories of “race” that demonstrated his ignorance of Jewish halakhic Law.

Typically, Kreisky also equated the nationalist ideology of Israel’s ruling Likud party with Fascism and the racist doctrines of South African apartheid.³³ Such denigration was never applied by Kreisky to Arab nationalism. He avoided any public criticism of the grandiose, proto-fascist pretensions of Arab Socialism, whether in its Nasserist or Baathist versions. Such double standards were increasingly common among European Socialist leaders in the late 1970s. This was especially true of those influenced by an anti-American, Third Worldist orientation, like Olaf Palme, then Prime Minister of Sweden, and an

³⁰ See Robert S. Wistrich, “An Austrian Variation on Socialist Antisemitism,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 8, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1974): 1-10.

³¹ Kreisky, *Die Zeit in der wir leben*, 67; also the interview with the Beirut daily, *al-Safir*, 16 June 1980, reproduced in “Austria and the Palestine Question,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 10, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 167-74.

³² *Ibid.* Also *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (henceforth NZZ), 5 Sept. 1978, and *Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)*, 17 Aug. 1979.

³³ “Kreisky et les Juifs,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 151.

Israel-hater of purest Social Democratic vintage, who was also a close personal friend of Bruno Kreisky.³⁴

There were also important economic interests at stake. Kreisky's courtship of the Arab world intensified after the 1973 oil crisis which accentuated European and Austrian dependence on the goodwill of the Arab petroleum producers.³⁵ But his outlook on the Arab-Israeli conflict crystallized above all in the framework of his Middle East fact-finding missions on behalf of the Socialist International. A wide variety of friendly contacts with Arab leaders encouraged him to develop a markedly benign interpretation of their attitudes towards Israel.³⁶ His views were a curious combination of prescience and prejudice. Thus in the late 1970s Kreisky was ahead of his time in favoring the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the "occupied territories". At the same time, his equation of Israel's settlements in the West Bank with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was insulting, unnecessary and wrong.³⁷

Kreisky spared no effort (along with his friend, the former West German Socialist Chancellor Willy Brandt) to make Yasser Arafat respectable (*salonfähig*) in the West. He did everything to present the PLO leader as a man of peace – which was emphatically not the case. Similarly, he was the first Western leader to grant Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, the red carpet treatment, although he knew full well that the Libyan leader was dedicated to Israel's destruction. What particularly angered many Israelis and Diaspora Jews was the Austrian Chancellor's insistence on presenting terrorist leaders like Gaddafi and Arafat as admirable "patriots" and "freedom-fighters." This conjuring trick occurred at the very time that Kreisky was publicly reviling Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin as a criminal terrorist and "a little Polish lawyer or whatever

³⁴ See Carl Gershman, "The Socialists and the PLO," *Commentary* (Oct. 1979): 36-44, for an account of the Third Worldist orientation that began to dominate the Socialist International from the mid-1970s with its pro-PLO and anti-Israel consequences.

³⁵ See *Der Spiegel*, no. 29 (1979), where Kreisky explicitly linked the change in policy of the Socialist International with the Arab oil factor, vulgarizing Marx by suggesting that "gewisse Existenzfragen sensibilisierend wirken."

³⁶ *Report of the Socialist International Fact Finding Mission to the Middle East*, Circular No. B 14/7 (London 1977), Introduction by Bruno Kreisky. The report claimed that the Arab States were ready to recognize Israel's right to exist within the 1967 borders and that the creation of an independent Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza was the only answer to the conflict. Thirty years later this is a very widely held position in Europe. To that extent we can say Kreisky was ahead of his time.

³⁷ *Free Palestine* (May 1976); *The Observer*, 27 February 1977; *Der Spiegel*, no. 48 (1979); and *NZZ*, 15 Mar. 1980, 78-82, where Kreisky drew a particularly unpleasant parallel: "Wer sagt: Russen raus aus Afghanistan muß auch sagen: Israelis raus aus der Westbank!" See also Robert Wistrich, "Kreisky, Arafat and Friends," *Encounter* (Nov. 1980).

he is.”³⁸

Kreisky’s diatribes against Begin during the latter’s term of office as Israeli Prime Minister went far beyond the question of his settlement policy and the Likud’s nationalist commitment to the whole land of Israel. For Kreisky, Begin embodied the warped mentality of the *Ostjuden*, “alienated from normal ways of thinking”. This was the kind of remark that gained the Austrian Chancellor a growing reputation for Jewish self-loathing. Much to his own anger and dismay, Kreisky found himself compared in Jewish circles to such pathological *Selbsthasser* (self-haters) as Karl Marx, Otto Weininger, or Simone Weil.³⁹ The Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, sarcastically declared that Kreisky required the kind of psychiatric treatment pioneered by fellow Viennese Jews such as Sigmund Freud or Alfred Adler. The Israeli satirist, Ephraim Kishon, writing in September 1978 went further still, drawing the conclusion that “our big brother has decided he’s got a hump, and therefore he hates all humpbacks.” There was no doubt in Kishon’s mind that Kreisky was “a first class antisemite,” going around “like an angry bull with his own private red flag, for all that it’s blue-and-white in your case.”⁴⁰

Kishon’s vitriolic satire came in response to an interview given by Kreisky to the Dutch Protestant newspaper *Trouw* in which he had castigated Israeli chauvinism and “apartheid” on the West Bank. The Chancellor mocked the “refined hooliganism” of the Israeli army, the primitiveness of its diplomats, and the stupidity of the Jews in general.⁴¹ These were things, Kishon observed, which were no longer publicly heard in the West except on scratched 40-year-

³⁸ *Jerusalem Post*, 3 Sept. 1978; *NZZ*, 7 Sept. 1978; on Gadaffi, see Thalberg, *Von der Kunst*, 480.

³⁹ See Martin van Amerongen, *Die Samenzwering tegen Simon Wiesenthal* (The conspiracy against Simon Wiesenthal) (Amsterdam 1976) and the remark of Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek (himself of Viennese origin) quoted in *Die Welt*, 6 Sept. 1978: “Kreisky kann nur noch von einem Psychiater, wie es Alfred Adler oder Sigmund Freud war, geholfen werden.” Also Heinz Galinski, “Ein Fall politischer Psychopathologie. Zum jüdischen Selbsthass Dr. Bruno Kreisky’s”; and *Jüdische Rundschau*, 14 Sept. 1978.

⁴⁰ Ephraim Kishon, “Schlage uns, Bruno, wir sind deine Trommel,” *Der Spiegel*, no. 37 (11 Sept. 1978): 142-45 and Wistrich, “The Strange Case of Bruno Kreisky,” *Encounter* (May 1979): 78-85 for an earlier discussion of these statements.

⁴¹ *NZZ*, 5 Sept. 1978. In this report Kreisky referred to the Israeli army as “eine verfeinerte Form des Banditentums.” He later tried to repair the damage by suggesting that his “off-the-record” comment had been quoted out of context. He declared himself ready to apologize if he had offended anyone but stood by his political views. See *Jüdische Rundschau*, 7 Sept. 1978, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 Sept. 1978; see also Bruno Kreisky, *Im Strom der Politik. Der Memoiren*, vol 2. (Berlin, Zürich, and Vienna 1987), where he again condemned Israel’s “unbounded intolerance” towards the Palestinians and its alleged “refusal to create the preconditions for peaceful co-existence with the Arab States.” Extracts in English appeared in *Austria Today*, 4, no. 88 (1988): 51-52.

old-records.

Kreisky, however, insisted that his fierce criticism of Israeli government policy was perfectly legitimate and that he was the innocent victim of Zionist abuse. His hostility and anger came out clearly in an interview with *Ma'ariv* in July 1979, following the royal welcome which he had granted Arafat in Vienna. Asked what they had talked about, he hit back:

One talks about the extraordinary arrogance of Israeli behavior. Obviously—and this should be made clear to you—the central idea of these talks tends towards a comparison between Israel and South Africa.... Israel intends to set up a “Bantustan” on the West Bank—an area in which the Arab population would have no effective rights, with Israel controlling all the resources.⁴²

The presentation of Israel as an “apartheid State” was at that time, an integral part of Soviet, Trotskyist, and new Left propaganda. Kreisky’s insistence on using this offensive analogy was curious since he was so eager to put himself forward as a mediator between Israel and the Arabs. He always maintained that he had worked hard to convince Palestinians to be more flexible and realistic towards the Jewish State, just as he sought to persuade Israelis that they should accept a small demilitarized Palestinian state. So why deliberately antagonize Israel by stigmatizing its alleged “racism”?

The contrast between Arab and Jewish responses to Kreisky’s efforts as an “honest broker” was revealing in this regard. Arafat repeatedly called the Austrian Chancellor “my friend” and a “friend of the Palestinian people.” Partly, this was simple gratitude for official Austrian recognition of the PLO which happened in the summer of 1979. But the PLO also perceived an *ideological affinity*. Kreisky had argued that Nazism nourished Zionism and even suggested a resemblance between the two movements. He repeatedly stated that Zionist thinking towards Arabs was arrogant and chauvinist; that a Palestinian state was historically necessary; and that opposition to it was unforgivable political stupidity. Israeli settlement policy, to his mind, was not only vainglorious but also *the* major obstacle to peace. At the same time, Arab rejectionism was simply ignored as if it had never existed or was irrelevant to the present. Naturally, this was music to Palestinian ears. But more was involved than history or politics. When Chancellor Kreisky announced that “there is no Jewish nation, only a Jewish religious community (*Religionsgemeinschaft*) or community of faith”, his declaration was identical to the view in the Palestinian National Covenant of 1974. For Kreisky this was a personal credo.

Although he never explicitly denied Israel’s right to exist, Kreisky’s *visceral*

⁴² Interview in *Ma'ariv* (Hebrew), 5 July 1979.

anti-Zionism was undoubtedly seen by Arafat and the Palestinians as sapping the legitimacy of the Jewish state. They, too, insisted that “Judaism, in its character as a religion, is not a nationality with an independent existence” (Article 20 of the Palestinian National Covenant) and that Jewish nationhood was an unreal, artificial concept. Kreisky profoundly agreed with this anti-Zionist dogma, telling *Die Presse* (January 1978) in an interview for a special supplement on the Arab world:

In my opinion, the Jews are no nation. For me, the different Jewish groups are communities of fate.... Jews live everywhere in the world. They have much more in common in both appearance and way of life with their host peoples than they have with each other.... There exist jet-black Jews, Indian Jews, and Mongolian Jews.

Ethnic diversity among Jews had become another Marxian stick with which to beat Zionism. The Arab media purred with pleasure at such statements and lapped up Kreisky’s public denunciations of “Zionist” political pressure to make him change his Middle Eastern policy. They well remembered that he had closed Schoenau castle in October 1973 as a transit camp for Soviet Jews; that he negotiated with Arab terrorists during the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries hostage crisis in Vienna (December 1975); and that he regarded the PLO massacre of innocent Israeli citizens on the Tel Aviv highway in March 1978 as an inevitable result of “Israel’s shortsighted policy”.⁴³ His statements, approvingly quoted by the London-based *Free Palestine* in December 1975, were perfectly in tune with the Arab propaganda campaign against Zionism, on an upswing since the November 1975 UN resolution condemning Zionism as a form of “racism.” The Austrian Federal Chancellor did not mince words:

I don’t submit to Zionism. I reject it. It is true I am of Jewish origin and that my family is Jewish, but this does not mean I have a special commitment to the Zionist State and the Israelis, I reject that completely.... When Zionists ask those of Jewish faith outside Israel to be bound by a special commitment to the State of Israel and to work for it as though they were Israeli citizens, they are adopting a wrong political line which leads to the isolation of these Jewish

⁴³ On the Schoenau affair, see Thalberg, *Von der Kunst*, 419. Kreisky nevertheless continued to permit Soviet Jews to transit through Austria with full freedom of choice concerning their ultimate destination: see *JTA*, 25 Mar. 1977 and 26 Nov. 1984 for his pride in this humanitarian policy. For the PLO terrorist assault in Israel, see “Kreisky blames Jerusalem”: *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 Mar. 1978; *JTA*, 16 Mar. 1978; and “Umstrittene Aeusserungen Kreiskys und Pahrs. Israelische Selbstschuld am Massaker von Tel Aviv,” *NZZ*, 16 Mar. 1978. On the hostages, “Die Geiselnahme von Wien,” *Vormwärts*, 25 Dec. 1975.

citizens from their national motherland and leaves them forever isolated in their communities... [I]here is nothing which binds me to Israel or to what is called the Jewish “people” or to Zionism.⁴⁴

Kreisky periodically evoked the theme of Zionist blackmail, which enthused not only Arabs but also neo-Nazis in postwar Germany and Austria. The key factor in their enthusiasm was the Austrian Chancellor’s determination to let sleeping Nazis lie while business went on as usual.⁴⁵ Unlike Willy Brandt, his closest international ally, the Austrian Socialist leader ostentatiously dismissed what West German politicians called “the overcoming of the past” (*Bewältigung der Vergangenheit*) as “empty words” (*ein Gerede*).⁴⁶ No doubt the political, social and numerical weight of nearly 700,000 *ehemaligen* (or former Nazi Party members) in a small nation like Austria with only seven million people, played its part in forming his attitude and that of his party.

In common with other post-war socialist and conservative leaders Kreisky was determined not to arouse old wounds or divisions and to avoid alienating the former Nazis.⁴⁷ His defense of the youthful “political mistakes” of those ex-Nazis whom he included in his first Cabinet in 1970 had of course been warmly greeted by the neo-Nazi and radical right.⁴⁸ They were fascinated by the new Chancellor’s willingness to crush their old *bête noire*, Simon Wiesenthal, and to brand him as a dangerous “reactionary.”⁴⁹ In Kreisky’s eyes, Wiesenthal’s meticulous, patient search for Nazi war criminals was not merely quixotic. It was detrimental to Austria’s self-image. Far from being an act of justice and a necessary education for future generations, these activities were regarded by Kreisky as “vengeful,” divisive, and politically inexpedient. Hence, the Chancellor and his ruling Socialist party determined to stop Wiesenthal, even if it meant relying on fabrications from the Soviet Bloc (especially in Russia and Poland) – countries in which Wiesenthal’s Documentation Centre had been branded a tool of the CIA, British Intelligence, and the Israeli Secret Service.⁵⁰ The Polish Communists, in particular, issued deliberate falsehoods

⁴⁴ Kreisky made his remarks in the course of a stinging attack on Wiesenthal, “Kreisky Accuses Top Zionist of Nazi Collaboration,” *Free Palestine* (Dec. 1975), and *Palestine*, 2, no. 8 (Jan. 1976): 35-37.

⁴⁵ *Deutsche Nationalzeitung*, 21 Nov. 1975; *Deutsche Wochenzeitung*, 5 Dec. 1975; also “Vorwand Wiesenthal,” *Wiener Tagebuch*, no. 12, (Dec. 1975): 2.

⁴⁶ Robert Knight, “The Waldheim Context: Austria and Nazism,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 Oct. 1986.

⁴⁷ “Problematik der Nazi-Prozesse in Oesterreich,” *NZZ*, 15 Aug. 1972; and Wistrich, “An Austrian Variant on Socialist Antisemitism,” 10.

⁴⁸ Franz Kirchberger, “Kreisky in der NS-Falle” *Deutsche Wochenzeitung*, 29 May 1970.

⁴⁹ *Vrij Nederland*, 1 July 1970.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Izydor Lucki, “Szymon Wiesenthal, na szlaku agentur, wywiadu i zdrady,” *Perspektywy* (Warsaw), no. 25 (30 Jan. 1970). The series in *Profil* (Vienna) entitled

maintaining that Wiesenthal himself had been a Nazi “agent” during the war and that he manufactured disinformation about antisemitism in Communist Eastern Europe. Kreisky encouraged this defamatory campaign, several times suggesting that Wiesenthal was indeed a “collaborator” whose own past warranted close investigation.⁵¹ At a Press Conference held at the Concordia Press Club in Vienna on 10 November 1975, an East German Communist correspondent warmly endorsed Kreisky’s charges: “Herr Bundeskanzler, was Sie über Wiesenthal und seine Methoden gesagt haben ist vollkommen richtig.” (Mr. Chancellor, what you have said about Wiesenthal and his methods is perfectly correct.)

Matters came to a head in the wake of the spectacular Socialist victory at the polls in October 1975. Before the elections, most observers assumed that the Austrian Social Democrats would have to form a coalition with the small Freedom Party led by Friedrich Peter, which had increasingly abandoned right-wing extremism for a more liberal orientation. However, just before Election Day, Simon Wiesenthal revealed that Peter had been involved in Nazi war crimes as a tank commander in the 1st SS Infantry brigade which was responsible for the murder of 10,513 innocent men, women, and children on the Eastern front. Peter admitted to having been a member of this Waffen-SS unit, but denied any personal involvement in shootings or “illegal acts.”⁵² Though Kreisky no longer needed Peter’s support, he furiously attacked Wiesenthal as the agent of an organized Israeli campaign “to bring me down.” The “conspiracy” against the Austrian Chancellor had been launched, so he claimed, because he had not fulfilled his task “in the service of Israel.” Kreisky denounced the “Zionist ideology” about his alleged indifference to Israel as a “posthumous assumption of Nazi ideas in reverse.”

An irrational and unmistakably paranoid element now emerged in Kreisky’s responses to Wiesenthal. This became apparent in an interview with the Israeli journalist Zeev Barth, reproduced in *Der Spiegel* on 17 November 1975. After explaining that he came from a “quite different milieu” from Wiesenthal, Kreisky lost control, declaring that “the man [Wiesenthal] must disappear”

“Wer ist Simon Wiesenthal?,” beginning with no. 44 (28 Oct. 1975) answers these slanders and provides a generally reliable account of the whole background.

⁵¹ *Profil*, 18 Nov. 1975, 22-25. On the same occasion Kreisky emphasized that he and Wiesenthal “kommen aus ganz verschiedenen Kulturkreisen, aus verschiedenen Religionsgemeinschaften überhaupt.” He also used for the first time the threatening phrase “Der Mann muß verschwinden” in relation to Wiesenthal.

⁵² “Der Fall Peter,” *Profil*, 14 Oct. 1975, 10, 12-16; “Peter und die Mordbrigade,” *ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1975, 18-23; and Peter Michael Lingens, “Grenzen des Opportunismus,” *ibid.*, no. 47, 18 Nov. 1975. Also *Die Presse*, 8 Nov. 1975, 11 Nov. 1975, 22 Nov. 1975; and *Der Neue Mahnruf* (Dec. 1975).

(*Der Mann muss verschwinden*). When Barth questioned him further about his allegation that Wiesenthal had used “political Mafia” methods, Kreisky thundered back that he would not stand trial before the Israeli or Jewish public. His parting salvo, “If the Jews are a people, then they are an ugly people” (*Wenn die Juden ein Volk sind, so ist es ein mieses Volk*), aggravated an already embittered situation beyond repair.⁵³ As a commentator in the respected German Socialist newspaper *Vorwärts* ironically put it in December 1975, it appeared that “Superman Kreisky also has a problem which he has not quite overcome—his Jewish origin.”⁵⁴ In his anxiety to prove himself more Austrian than the Austrians and demonstrate his total separation from everything Jewish, Kreisky was undermining his own case. He now came under fire from a strange alliance of the independent weekly, *Profil*, the anti-fascist resistance organizations, the Communist Party in Austria, the local Jewish community, as well as a good part of the international press. Even in his own Socialist Party there was some uneasiness about the Chancellor’s insistence on a court battle with Wiesenthal and a growing desire to cool tempers.⁵⁵

On the other hand, old and new Nazis in Central Europe could scarcely conceal their delight at the spectacle of an Austrian Chancellor of Jewish origin seeking to demolish Simon Wiesenthal. By the end of 1975 Kreisky had become an honorary “Aryan” par excellence in the eyes of pan-German nationalists. They loudly applauded his repudiation of any loyalty to specifically Jewish concerns and his outbursts against “boundless Zionist intolerance.”⁵⁶ German neo-Nazis had no doubt at all about the meaning of Kreisky’s attacks on Wiesenthal: “Kreisky wants a reconciliation with the ex-Nazis,” trumpeted the *Deutsche Nationalzeitung*, hoping that it might finally gain some respectability thanks to the efforts of the Socialist Chancellor. Peter Michael Lingens, writing in the left-wing *Profil* on 18 November 1975, sarcastically observed that for people like Kreisky “to be accepted by former Nazis is apparently the ultimate form of dream fulfillment.”⁵⁷

⁵³ “Kreisky: Die Juden—ein mieses Volk,” *Der Spiegel*, 17 Nov. 1975.

⁵⁴ Ulrich Brunner, “Kratzer am Kanzler” (Kleinkrieg Kreisky-Wiesenthal und kein Ende), *Vorwärts*, 18 Dec. 1975.

⁵⁵ “Sozialistische Schutzmauer um Kreisky gegen Wiesenthal,” *FAZ*, 4 Dec. 1975; Hanni Konitzer, “Nach der Wiener Affäre: Eine miese Geschichte,” *FAZ*, 5 Dec. 1975.

⁵⁶ “Kann Kreisky Wiesenthal stoppen?,” *Deutsche Nationalzeitung*, 7 Nov. 1975; “Wiesenthal ein Agent,” *ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1975; “Wie weit reicht Israels Macht?,” *ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1975; and “Israels Rächer in Deutschland. Ist Wiesenthal am Ende?,” *ibid.*, Dec. 1975. Wiesenthal himself seemed resigned in an interview, “Nur Don Quijote würde weitermachen,” with *Der Spiegel*, 12 Jan. 1976.

⁵⁷ “Neonazis: Von Kreisky lernen,” *Profil*, no. 39 (21 Sept. 1975), 13. “Versöhnung mit den Nazis—aber wie?,” *ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1975, 18-23, and the Peter Michael Lingens, *ibid.*, 18

During the Wiesenthal-Peter affair, Kreisky had acted as if the mass murder of European Jewry was merely a side issue and his main duty as Federal Chancellor was to whitewash Austrian consciences, liberating them from the sins of their fathers! The fact that a Jew played out this expiatory and apologetic role provided the Austrian population with a powerful alibi, acquitting them of the need for any serious confrontation with the Nazi legacy. Such unexpected *absolution* greatly enhanced Kreisky's personal standing in Austria, despite the criticism to which he was subject to in some circles.⁵⁸

Even after his retirement as Austrian Chancellor in 1983, Kreisky did not change his attitude to Simon Wiesenthal, gratuitously attacking him and other Austrians of Jewish origin who had supposedly been "ardent Fascists."⁵⁹ Though unforgiving with regard to the alleged wrongdoings of his "co-religionists," Kreisky seemed to take pride in the fact that he absolved almost everybody else (especially ex-Nazis!) during his term of office. Israelis, of course, did not escape Kreisky's vindictive wrath. In the *Kronenzeitung* at the end of May 1986 he scathingly attacked Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir as a "terrorist leader," accusing him of seeking to mobilize the West against the newly elected Austrian President Kurt Waldheim and of trying to falsely paint Austria as an antisemitic state.⁶⁰

Bruno Kreisky persistently downplayed Austrian antisemitism throughout his career, while frequently criminalizing the actions of Israel. The "grotesque Mr. Kreisky", as *The Jerusalem Post* once called him, was certainly a pioneer in these and other respects.⁶¹ He was also the first European statesman outside France, to unequivocally embrace the Palestinian cause.⁶² At the same time, the Austrian Chancellor had his moments of lucidity, warning Israel that unless it solved the Palestinian Question in an equitable manner, it would reap the whirlwind of Islamic fundamentalism. Israel, he insisted, could not survive as a "Crusader State." If it wanted binding declarations from the PLO it would also have to respect Palestinian *national* rights. But such declarations were not balanced by any public disavowal of Palestinian terror against Israeli or Jewish civilians.

Nov. 1975: "Von ehemaligen Nazis akzeptiert zu werden, ist demnach die extremste Form der Traumerfüllung."

⁵⁸ It is certainly significant that according to one poll almost 60 per cent of the Austrian population supported Kreisky's position at the end of 1975 as against only 3 per cent who were in favour of Wiesenthal, with the rest either neutral or unconcerned: see *Profil*, no. 6, 3 Feb. 1976.

⁵⁹ *Profil*, 21 Apr. 1986.

⁶⁰ *Kronenzeitung*, 28 May 1986.

⁶¹ "The grotesque Mr. Kreisky," *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Sept. 1978 for earlier editorial comment.

⁶² Interview with Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, *Der Spiegel*, no. 29 (1979).

Kreisky's insistence on negotiating with terrorists usually ended in a surrender to their demands. In 1975, for example, an Austrian policeman was shot and killed during the OPEC siege in Vienna. Kreisky said little about the actual victim but he was vocal in maintaining that resistance to terrorism was useless.⁶³ In the same vein, he opposed American counter-terrorist retaliation against Libya's Colonel Gaddafi in 1986.⁶⁴ Similarly, with regard to Yasser Arafat, the Chancellor preferred to turn a blind eye to Palestinian extremism, insisting—publicly at least—that Arafat's "peaceful" intentions towards Israel were beyond doubt.⁶⁵ Privately, however, he knew that this was false.

Ever since the fact-finding mission of the Socialist International to the Middle East in 1973, in which he had been the chief mediator, Kreisky placed his main hope in drawing closer to "progressive" Arab forces. Since 1977 he consistently advocated recognition of the PLO as the sole spokesman of the Palestinians and sought to consolidate support for a Palestinian state.⁶⁶ But the Palestinians did not renounce terrorism in favor of peace; and there was little prospect of nourishing a "progressive" Arab socialism, overthrowing Middle Eastern military dictators, reforming authoritarian one-party states, or changing the outlook of the oil sheikhs in the Persian Gulf. As a consequence, Kreisky's new course accomplished little for the Socialist International, the Palestinians, Israel, or the peace process.⁶⁷ If anything, his "soft" line reinforced the intransigence of Palestinian terrorism while alienating most Israelis and Diaspora Jews.

Kreisky was privately far more critical of Arafat's policies than he ever indicated publicly. Already in 1974, during a fact-finding mission of the Socialist International in Cairo, Arafat made an "unfavorable impression" on him with his cliché-ridden revolutionary phraseology and pro-Soviet outlook. He was also disturbed by the PLO leader's lack of any strategic plan. The correspondence between them reveals that despite effuse and flattering professions of friendship from Arafat, Kreisky was aware of the Palestinian leader's deceptions and character weaknesses.⁶⁸ Moreover, the Austrian

⁶³ *New York Times*, 22 Dec. 1975.

⁶⁴ See Kreisky's memoirs (Vienna 2000), 3: 211.

⁶⁵ Henry Delfiner, "The Socialist International and the Rise of Yasser Arafat," *Midstream* (Nov.-Dec. 2002): 4-8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ Delfiner, "Socialist International," 6; see also Carl Greshman, "The Socialists and the PLO," *Commentary* (Oct. 1979), and Yoram Peri, "Fall from Favor, Israel and the Socialist International," *Jerusalem Quarterly* (Summer 1982).

⁶⁸ See "Kreisky-Arafat. Die unveröffentlichte Korrespondenz. Dokumente von Freundschaft und Weltpolitik," *Profil*, no. 47, 15 Nov. 2004, 35-44, based on 30 unpublished letters in the Kreisky Archives in Vienna that were exchanged with Yasser Arafat.

Chancellor disliked Arafat's repeated comparisons of Israeli policy with the Nazi Holocaust and his references to Israeli leaders as "neo-Hitlers"—though, as we have seen, Kreisky was also given to emotional exaggeration on this issue. He shrewdly warned Arafat that he must decide whether he wanted to remain a revolutionary guerilla fighter or become a statesman. Time would show that this was indeed a fatal flaw in Arafat's leadership.

In their correspondence, Kreisky severely reproached Arafat for a series of Palestinian terror attacks on Jewish targets in Europe which had taken place in Frankfurt, Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, and Vienna between 1979 and 1982. He was shocked and depressed by "this self-destructive activity" and the "Massada-type attitude" that it revealed. Such "senseless" acts of terror robbed the Palestinian cause of its justification.⁶⁹ Kreisky added that he was "personally deeply hurt" by the assault on the Jewish synagogue in Vienna. Although Dr. Isaam Sartawi (who was the closest of all the Palestinian leadership to Kreisky), assured him that the attack was carried out by a non-Palestinian group, the Chancellor was not fooled. He pointedly emphasized that this terrorism had been perpetrated under the Palestinian flag, by a group attached to the PLO, something completely unacceptable. But there was no hint of these recriminations to the broader public.

The same pattern continued with the murder by the Palestinian terror group, Abu Nidal, of the Socialist municipal councilor and President of the Austrian-Israeli friendship society Heinz Nittel. The killing took place in the spring of 1981 during a May Day parade to the Rathausplatz in Vienna.⁷⁰ Kreisky was shaken to the core by this assassination and his trust in Arafat was further eroded by another terror attack in which two visitors to a Vienna synagogue died. If that were not enough, the PLO ambassador to Austria, Ghazi Hussein, was caught at Vienna airport with two suitcases of weapons, delivered from Beirut. Once more, the Austrian Chancellor felt "deeply betrayed."⁷¹ The assassination by Islamic fundamentalists in October 1981 of Anwar el-Sadat, the Egyptian leader who had signed the Peace Treaty with Israel, was another source of friction between the two leaders. Arafat was overjoyed by the news—a reaction which Bruno Kreisky found incomprehensible. Whatever the Chancellor's misgivings about Sadat's policy, he knew that the murder of the Egyptian President was a serious blow to peace.

Despite this growing tension, Arafat continued to express "great appreciation and gratitude" for Kreisky's activities on behalf of the Palestinians. He warmly thanked the Chancellor for his formal recognition of

⁶⁹ "Mein lieber Freund," *Profil*, no. 47, 15 Nov. 2004, 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷¹ Erwin Lanc interview, *ibid.*, 39, Lanc was Kreisky's Foreign Minister at the time.

the PLO and participation in events like Palestine Solidarity Day. In response to Kreisky's reproaches, he insisted on the PLO's right to undertake military actions in face of what he called Menahem Begin's "neo-Nazi" regime and the Israeli "genocide" against the Palestinian people. Arafat's hyperbole was, however, becoming too much even for a veteran anti-Zionist like Kreisky.

The point of no return in the relationship between Kreisky and Arafat was reached with the murder of Dr. Isaam Sartawi (the most moderate of the PLO leaders) by radical elements within Arafat's organization. Kreisky had spent many hours discussing Middle Eastern problems with Sartawi in Vienna. He regarded Arafat's public acceptance of the need for Israeli-Palestinian coexistence as a test case for the PLO's future relationship with the West European democracies.⁷² However, at a meeting of the Palestine National Council in 1983, Arafat had forbidden any declaration that would have proposed recognition of Israel's right to exist. A few weeks later Sartawi was shot dead in Portugal by killers from the Abu Nidal group. The murder coincided with a meeting of the Socialist International which Kreisky attended. This was literally the last straw. Kreisky held Arafat personally responsible for having withdrawn his protection from Sartawi. By 1983 when Kreisky resigned as Austria's Chancellor for reasons of ill-health, his relationship with the PLO leader had effectively ended.

The Kreisky era, despite its many modernizing achievements on the Austrian domestic front, and in foreign policy, did not exercise a positive influence on Austrian attitudes to Israel, Jews, Judaism, and the Jewish people as a whole. One symptom of this failure in communication was the Chancellor's protracted vendetta against Simon Wiesenthal, which ended with a humiliating defeat for Kreisky in the Vienna courts.⁷³ But Wiesenthal was only the symptom of a deeper problem. Kreisky's outbursts against *Ostjuden*, international Jewry, or so-called "Zionist" interference in Austrian internal affairs, went far beyond what was necessary. Indeed, they may have helped prepare the ground for the antisemitic rhetoric of a number of Austrian Conservative politicians during the Waldheim Affair. In this context Simon Wiesenthal claimed in 1986: "If Bruno Kreisky were chancellor today, Waldheim would be the joint candidate of both big parties. And Kreisky would defend Waldheim against the World Jewish Congress and the Jews with all his power".⁷⁴

⁷² Letter of 24 Dec. 1979, in *ibid.*, 36.

⁷³ On 19 October 1989 Kreisky was convicted of malicious slander in a libel initiated years before by his old adversary. He received a three-year suspended sentence and was obliged to pay 270,000 Austrian schillings (about \$ 20,000) in compensation; *Jerusalem Post*, 24 Nov. 1989; and the interview with Simon Wiesenthal in *Der Spiegel*, no. 47 (1989), 260 ff.

⁷⁴ Wiesenthal's comment to Ilona Henry as reported in the *Jerusalem Post*, 23 May 1986.

Bruno Kreisky remains an enigmatic, sphinx-like figure in many respects. He was a charismatic politician with the adaptability of a chameleon, gifted with an intuitive sense for symbolism and mobilizing public emotions. He was exceptionally skillful in handling the mass media. In foreign affairs he was often astute and statesmanlike in navigating the crises provoked by the Cold War. His relations with Israel were however a disaster area. This is all the more striking since Bruno Kreisky is to this day the only Jew who has ever governed a German-speaking country. This was a feat which he pulled off for thirteen years without ever losing an election. Furthermore, it was achieved in one of the most antisemitic countries of Europe which had been heavily implicated in the mass murder of European Jewry and of his own family. On his way to the top, Kreisky managed to surmount the prejudices in his own Socialist party as well as the pervasive Judeophobia in Austrian society. Yet, despite losing more than twenty of his relatives in the extermination camps and being forced out of Austria by the Gestapo, he never revised his assimilationist views or hostility to Zionism. Since the age of 16, Kreisky had jettisoned Judaism, removing his name from the rolls of the Viennese Jewish community (*Kultusgemeinde*). At the same time, being Jewish was never something he denied or sought to cover up. He continued to regard himself as a convinced secularist (*konfessionslos*), a Marxist socialist and an Austrian patriot. He knew that the post-1945 Socialist party leadership under Adolf Schärff, did not want Jews in a prominent party role. Even in February 1967, when Kreisky unexpectedly became leader of the SPÖ it was only after an acrimonious debate in which cutting references were made to his non-proletarian background and (by implication) to his “Jewish” antecedents. During the elections of 1970, insinuations by the conservatives that only their candidate was a “true Austrian” must have heightened his sensitivity to the issue.

Antisemitism remained an irritant but it was largely disregarded by Kreisky, once he was in power. He was determined to put Austria’s Nazi legacy behind him at almost any price. Yet this deliberate amnesia would rebound against him with the force of a boomerang. His explosive conflict with the Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal which began in 1970 was the most visible expression of this “return of the repressed”. Wiesenthal’s battle against Austrian historical forgetfulness and his very public defense of the Jewish memory of the Holocaust remained anathema to Kreisky. So, too, were Israel’s policies and their Zionist foundations. He did not hesitate to insult Israel, repeatedly branding it a “police state”, run by men with a “fascist mentality”.⁷⁵ Such vilification, along with his flaunting of “Jewishness” in order to execrate Israel

⁷⁵ Herbert Pierre Secher, “Kreisky and the Jews”, in: *The Kreisky Era in Austria*, op. cit. pp. 10-33.

and glorify the PLO, earned him a reputation among many Israeli and Diaspora Jews of being a “renegade” and an outstanding exemplar of self-hatred. Elements of truth and exaggeration were almost equally mixed in this assessment.

Kreisky undoubtedly had a blind spot when it came to his own Jewish identity, the Nazi Holocaust and the State of Israel. In many ways he was the emblematic *Grenzjude* (marginal Jew) aspiring to become the golden *goy*. A child of the dying Habsburg Empire, he successfully mutated into Kaiser Bruno – a new kind of people’s Emperor. Kreisky embodied the perfect fusion between old and new, tradition and modernity, Austrian patriotism and socialist cosmopolitanism, Viennese wit and Jewish intellectuality. But the “Jewish question” proved to be the Achilles heel in his otherwise brilliant political career, a dark corner where neither reason nor experience sufficed to master the inner demons in his troubled soul.