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Hans Reichenfeld

... I think I'll play my cello instead

Hans Reichenfeld was born in Vienna on 26th February 1923. From late April 1938, he was, as a Jew, no longer permitted to attend the Academic High School there.

He was able to complete the school year at a high school in the 2nd municipal district of Vienna. In August 1938, Hans Reichenfeld left Austria. He was accepted as a pupil by a school in Great Britain.

When German and former Austrian nationals on British territory were declared "enemy aliens" and detained in detention camps after the outbreak of the Second World War, Hans Reichenfeld was also detained in 1940 and sent to Canada. In 1941 he returned to Great Britain. From 1944 to 1947 he served in the Royal Air Force. In 1952, he was able to complete his medical degree in London. Today, Hans Reichenfeld lives in Canada.



Isidor Ernst Reichenfeld, Hans Reichenfeld's father, was a general practitioner in Vienna and was arrested during the 1938 November pogroms. He remained incarcerated until March 1939. A few days after his release, Isidor Ernst Reichenfeld and his wife Klara were also able to emigrate to Great Britain.

Hans Reichenfeld recorded the events and direct consequences of the "Anschluss" [1] of Austria to the German Reich in his diary from his perspective as a Jewish student at the Academic High School in Vienna. His autobiography "On the fringe" was published in 2006. The German translation by Katherina and Ludwig Laher with the title "Bewegtes Exil. Erinnerungen an eine ungewisse Zukunft" was published in April 2010 by the publishing house Theodor Kramer Gesellschaft in Vienna.

Vienna, 7th April 1938

For me the "upheaval" initially had the pleasant result that there was no school for eight days. On the first day back at school there was then a celebration for the "aryan" students. Afterwards, the provisional director of the institute, the gym teacher Schmidt, held a marvelous speech for the Jews at the Academic High School in which he rambled on about Jewish world Bolshevism and explained that we were now a guest population and should behave as such. He would, however, ensure that we wouldn't be tormented. Then we had just under two weeks of "school". Of course it wasn't anything like usual school. Firstly, the Jewish teachers had been thrown out immediately, so we no longer had a Latin teacher. Then we had class in the afternoon from Monday to Wednesday and in the morning from Thursday to Saturday, because the Stubenbastei has moved in with us due to military billeting. So we only had four hours every day instead of five. But of these four hours, one, two or even three were often canceled because some bigwig or other had come from the Reich. And when we did have class, it was sometimes the case that the teacher simply declared that he had a headache and couldn't teach and we should do what we want, which our chemistry teacher Milan did twice. The Christian students behaved honorably, of course they wore the swastika without exception, but so far not a single person has stirred up trouble. When Jewish benches were introduced and the Jews had to sit on one row of benches and the non-Jews on the other, after class Wagner said to us: "Such nonsense! It used to be such a nice area, we chatted and cheated together on tests and now it's all over."

The teachers have to greet us with "Heil Hitler" at the beginning and the end of each lesson, but so far they are still all nice to us, only the geography teacher Waldemar Waldner [...] is stricter with the Jews among us. When we were discussing Palestine, he also said, "Now that the Jews are being gradually ejected from Europe, they are just searching for a new homeland in Palestine."

Now we haven't had school since 2nd April and I've been running from consulate to consulate but I've already had to give up, because there are no job prospects anywhere for doctors.

Recently, I was walking through Viktualienhalle [2] one afternoon, when an SA man nabbed me and I, along with many others, had to sweep the

hall. They really enjoy doing that, making Jews rub off all of the Schuschnigg writings, to the great amusement of the Viennese rabble. People were standing packed into the hall to watch the marvelous show. I didn't care at all, I even had to laugh sometimes when I saw the people standing there for hours, excitedly watching a few Jews sweep the floor.

But there must also be very courageous people in Vienna, not just the nasty rabble. Yesterday in front of the opera house I saw that the words painted on the tram stop, "One people, one Reich, one Führer, on 10th April" [3] were painted over in red, in front of the opera! That really requires a great amount of courage. There are also many posters which have been torn down. It's just that all this can't change anything now.

Heß, the "Führer's" deputy, is speaking now, but I won't listen to him, they all say the same things anyway. I think I'll play my cello instead

Uncle Ludwig had an accident today, but thank goodness nothing happened to him. He just had a little concussion and a few scratches. Maybe I'll visit him tomorrow.

Vienna, 28th April 1938

In school, the initial difference was that the Jewish students had to sit on the row of benches on the right and the non-Jewish students on the left. The other students were very decent and I can't complain about the teachers either. On the contrary, Bauer even spoke condemning the Nazis a few times. You could tell from his demeanor that he wasn't very enthusiastic about doing the Nazi salute before and after every class. On Monday, we had gym class and on the next day Scholz asked him not to test us to which he replied, "Well what can I do, I have to do many things I don't like doing!" Then we had to recite Homer. When we were done, Bauer remarked: "Černik, you've been reading from the book since the 20th verse and I'll tell you now, if you think you're going to pass because of how you are dressed, and for all I care you can tell the world, and if you want I'll give it to you in writing, you won't pass my class through supposed achievements in Greek, because as far as I'm concerned being German means doing some work." Černik is namely a super-Nazi and also (or maybe because of this) the worst student in the class. Yesterday he said something similar: it would not bother him if he were to fail those who are bad in his subject. Regardless of whether they sat there or there. But today the opportunity to also fail the Jews was taken from him because today we were thrown out of the Academic High School. This happened as follows: as usual, we arrived at school at 8 am. But the bell didn't ring, then it was five past 8, ten past 8, quarter past 8 and it still hadn't rung. We thought Nowak had gone mad. Finally, at 8:25, the bell began to ring. A few minutes later, Bauer entered the room with the main register. Then of course we knew how many it affected. Then a list of names of the Jewish students was drawn up with dates of birth and whether they had borrowed anything from the school. Then came the "Principal", gym teacher Schmidt, and said to us that we should give back the borrowed items by 11 o'clock and were to find our way to Zirkusgasse tomorrow at 11 [...]. Then we were dismissed. We said our goodbyes to our Christian schoolmates and went home.

First publication of this article in: Renate S. Meissner on behalf of the National Fund (Ed.): Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism. Vienna, 2010, pages 118-123.

[1] The "Anschluss" refers to the annexation of Austria and its integration into the German Reich on 13th of March 1938.

[2] Indoor market in the 3rd municipal district of Vienna.

[3] Day of the referendum.