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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Biographic Information Division

PROBST, Otto

Central Secretary, Socialist Party

AUSTRIA

Otto Probst, a powerful figure in Austrian politics, is a central secretary of the Socialist Party, and a Socialist deputy in the Nationalrat (Lower House of Parliament); he has occupied both positions since the mid-1940's. While Probst does not convey the impression of being an original and independent thinker, his views often reflect opinions in the top echelons of his party. Probst is well known in Socialist circles outside Austria, having represented the Austrian Socialist Party on the Bureau of the Socialist International, and having attended numerous meetings of this body. When the present Coalition Government was formed in July 1959, Probst was mentioned as belonging to a loosely organized inner circle of youthful and generally moderate Socialists who might be expected to assume increased responsibility within the Party. As a member of the Socialist group which negotiated with the People's Party in forming the coalition, he was among those who contributed the ouster from the cabinet of veteran Socialist Interior Minister Oskar Helmer.

Otto Probst was born into a working class family on December 29, 1911, in Vienna. After attending elementary and trade schools, he became an apprentice lithographer. As early as 1925, when Probst was 14 years old, he became identified with the Association of Socialist Workers' Youth. From 1931 to 1934, he worked for youth welfare organizations. In February 1934, he was forced by the Dollfus regime to give up a position in the Chamber of Labor, and in 1935 he was arrested for illegal political activity. He was released in 1936 but rearrested in 1937. The Nazis sent him to Mauthausen in 1939 where he remained until 1943, when he was sent to a military hospital. Wounded in battle, he spent the remaining war years in a military hospital.

On his return to Austria in 1945, Probst immediately resumed political activity and was soon elected to Parliament. He has served on several Parliamentary committees, including the agenda and immunity committees, and the committee for constitutional and administrative reform of which he is chairman. Since 1956 he has been Socialist representative on the National Defense Council, an advisory body on high level defense policy. He is actively interested in problems concerning workers' housing.

Probst visited the United States in 1952 as a leader-specialist in political affairs. In the course of the visit he took a particular interest in the living standards of American workers. As a member of an Austrian parliamentary delegation, Probst visited the Soviet Union in 1955. In his dealings with the Soviets, both during the occupation period and in international organizations, Probst has shown firmness, excellent judgment and tactical finesse.

Probst is married and is the father of a daughter, Edith, born in 1949.

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