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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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POLITICAL

1. Domestic Politics

Leaders of both coalition parties were working hard this week to clean up various items of business. Most of them then intend to take off on long holidays in what will be their last chance to rest before the election campaign begins in earnest. One new possible campaign issue emerged this week with the refusal by People's Party members of the Cabinet to support Vienna's bid for the 1972 summer Olympics. The OeVP members argued that the potential cost to the Federal Government was too great to be accepted in view of other pressing financial needs, particularly in the education field. Socialist spokesmen on the other hand are claiming that the OeVP negative attitude was occasioned out of spite toward the Socialist-controlled Vienna city government.

While not an issue in dispute between the two parties, another problem preoccupying top leaders, including Chancellor Klaus and Vice Chancellor Pittermann, is the controversy over the projected sale of the Rax Works, a rolling-stock plant owned by the nationalized Simmering-Graz-Pauker firm, to a private Austrian businessman. Although the sale was approved by appropriate representatives of both parties as a means of rescuing an ailing enterprise and although assurances of job security were given by the intended purchaser, the 500 workers at the plant have staged various protest demonstrations, including hunger strikes and sit-ins. Some trade union functionaries and Socialist officials in the Wiener Neustadt area seem to sympathize with the workers. Press reports indicate that both Communists and Olah supporters have played a role in stirring up the workers. (UNCLASSIFIED)

2. Verbelen Acquitted

Former Flemish SS leader Jan Verbelen was acquitted of war crimes by a Vienna jury December 21 and released from custody (although the prosecutor is appealing the verdict) after more than three years of pretrial detention. Although deciding that Verbelen had been involved in two of the five killings charged, the jury found that he had acted under irresistible duress; i.e., he had had no choice but to comply with the orders given him. The verdict, which came as a surprise to most journalists and other observers of the trial, has reportedly aroused great indignation in Belgium. Foreign Minister Spaak called in the Austrian Ambassador to inform her of the Belgian reaction and to warn that relations between the two countries are likely to suffer. A window in the Austrian consulate in Antwerp was smashed by stones and Belgian papers of various persuasions have commented bitterly about the acquittal.

The outcome has also aroused concern among Austrians. Independent Kurier and Neues Oesterreich have referred to the verdict as "shocking" and "incomprehensible," and Socialist Arbeiter-Zeitung spoke of a miscarriage of justice. The Austrian Resistance Movement issued a statement charging that Austria is on the way to becoming a "national park" for war criminals and neo-Nazis and the Association of Socialist High School Students announced that it would organize a parade in downtown Vienna tomorrow in protest against the acquittal. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: The verdict once again demonstrated how difficult it is to obtain from an Austrian jury in a war crimes trial a verdict that is at all commensurate with the deeds committed. Although there are of course many individuals here who are deeply troubled by the situation, the average Austrian apparently finds it easy to acquit or at the most impose light sentences on war criminals. By so doing, he avoids the necessity of facing up to the enormity of the Nazi crimes, the contemplation of which might arouse disquieting thoughts about his (or Austria's) share in the Nazi guilt. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE)

3. West European Communist Meeting

Representatives of West European Communist Parties gathered in Vienna last weekend at the invitation of the Austrian Communist Party. According to press reports, one of the principal topics of discussion was the experience of West European Communists in recent cooperation with Socialists and other left-wing groups, and the prospects and opportunities for further joint enterprises. (UNCLASSIFIED)

Comment: It seems likely that at least one of the motives of the Austrian Communist leaders in calling the meeting was to get help from their West European brethren in persuading the many members of the Austrian Party who are reluctant to go along with the leadership in endorsing Socialist candidates for the 1966 parliamentary elections. Austrian Communist Party Chairman Muhri apparently used a recent brief visit to Vienna by Italian Communist leaders for the same purpose. According to one well-informed source, Muhri has decided on a compromise recommendation that the Austrian Communist Party run its own candidate in the Vienna Northeast constituency (the Party's principal stronghold) and endorse Socialist candidates in the other 24 election districts. (CONFIDENTIAL)

4. Austro-Yugoslav Visa Agreement

The visa agreement between Austria and Yugoslavia negotiated last month (Weeks Nos. 47 and 48) was signed by Foreign Minister Kreisky and Yugoslav Ambassador Prpic on

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December 20 and went into effect the following day. All visa requirements are mutually abolished except for Yugoslav workers seeking employment in Austria. (UNCLASSIFIED)

5. New Malawi Ambassador

The first Ambassador of Malawi to Austria, Timon Sam Mangwazu, presented his credentials to President Jonas on December 20. The Ambassador will be resident in Bonn. (UNCLASSIFIED)

MILITARY - Negative

PSYCHOLOGICAL

A large share of editorial comment during the week was devoted to the successful Gemini space rendezvous. Also widely discussed was the re-election of French President de Gaulle in the runoff election.

1. Gemini Rendezvous

The political implications of the American space success formed the basis for almost all of the editorials on the subject. The rendezvous was interpreted as proof of American superiority in space and was welcomed as such. Independent Neues Oesterreich of December 17 hailed the feat as "an impressive demonstration of the technological genius and inexhaustible energies" of the United States, while People's Party Volksblatt of the same date contrasted the Soviet space successes, carried out at the expense of other sectors of their economy, with the "free vigor" of Americans whereby the United States has achieved its goals.

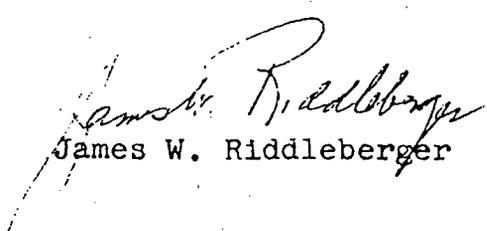
Independent Die Presse said in its December 17 and December 21 editions that the United States is pulling into the lead in the space race and ventured the hope that the Soviets may be ready for cooperation in preventing the use of space for military purposes, now that their hope of sure victory is vanishing.

Independent Kurier of December 18 stated that the United States is clearly ahead in space and "has a considerable lead" in technological and medical experience in space. This fact, it concluded, demonstrated the "fertility of the variegated and all-around American space program." People's Party Suedost Tagespost contrasted the highly advanced technology of space exploration with the "anachronistic" methods of the war in Viet-Nam and called for real cooperation between the big powers in space as a far better safeguard for the world than the present nuclear stalemate. (UNCLASSIFIED)

2. French Election

The tendency to view the outcome of the French elections as a setback for the policies of French President de Gaulle continued unchanged, but almost all editorials expressed a lack of belief that de Gaulle's campaign statements heralded any major change in French foreign policies.

Socialist Express of December 20 accused the French President of posing as a "convinced European" in order to gain votes. It compared this tactic with his promise to keep Algeria French, and predicted that the reaction within France will be a strong one as soon as it becomes clear that his oratorical changes between December 5 and 19 were merely campaign tactics. People's Party Volksblatt of December 21 said that no real change in French foreign policy is likely, and that, if there is no revision of that policy, de Gaulle may lose the respect of the French people and strengthen his opponents. Both Socialist Arbeiter-Zeitung and independent Neues Oesterreich predicted little or no change in French policy, and both stressed the belief that the next few months will be critical ones for de Gaulle and for the opposition. (UNCLASSIFIED)


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