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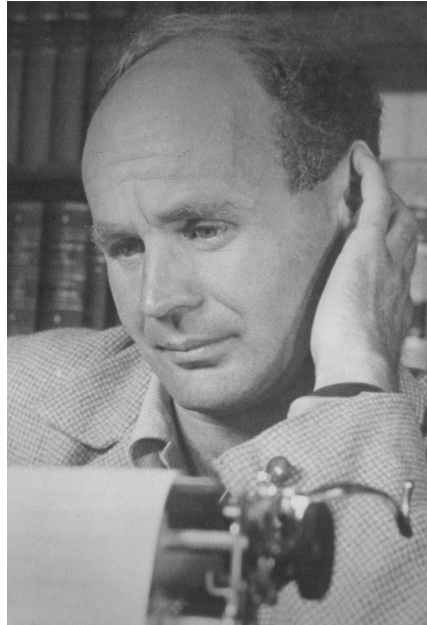
“Busy with Refugee Work”

Joseph Buttinger, Muriel Gardiner, and the Saving of Austrian Refugees, 1940–1941

At a time when Austria is experiencing political turbulences over the current “refugee crisis” of Syrian, Near Eastern and African asylum seekers, looking for a safe haven in Europe from the political turmoil in their regions, it might be worthwhile remembering that there were times in the twentieth century when Austrian refugees survived in similarly tumultuous situations with support from the “kindness of strangers.” Joseph Buttinger (1906–1992) and his wealthy American wife Muriel Gardiner (1901–1965) personally helped hundreds of Austrian Socialists and Jews (often both) persecuted by the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg regimes and the Nazis to get out of Austria – and later Europe – to save their lives. They were generous in helping to provide the necessary immigration papers and funds for refugees to start a new life in the United States. After the end of World War II they supported a hundred or so families with CARE packages over several years. The Buttingers became shining examples of professional and humanitarian refugee workers. Their empathetic “refugee work” stands as a paragon of humanitarian aid for our days as well.

Joseph Buttinger was born in Bavaria in 1906 and grew up in great poverty in Upper Austria. His father worked in various odd jobs and as a miner and fought on the Dolomite front in World War I; he died after being wounded. Buttinger’s family lived in a one-room apartment. Due to the family’s poverty he left school after six years as a 13-year old and started working as an agricultural laborer. He worked “like a slave” 16-hour days but at least was fed sufficiently. In 1921 he moved to an industrial town in Upper Austria and began work in a glass factory. Now working 8-hour days, he became a member of the Social Democratic Party and the glassworkers union. He also joined various social and cultural clubs such as the *Naturfreunde* and studied much on his own in the workers’ library. In 1922, the 16-year old Buttinger was elected chair of a local group of the Socialist Youth Movement. In 1924 his company closed shop. Buttinger enjoyed the benefits of the newly created unemployment insur-

ance. He used the next two years for intensive autodidactic studies, including the learning of English and French without any tutoring.¹



**Joseph Buttinger,
about 1942**

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In 1926 he began a career in the Social Democratic Party. He came to the attention of party leaders during workshops he participated in Vienna. Together with future party leaders such as Franz Jonas, he also attended the Social Democratic *Arbeiterhochschule* for a six-month course, a sort of party academy for upcoming leaders. Buttinger, the worker-turned-party-organizer, left the Party Academy with “enormous self-confidence and high-flying political ambitions.”² After a position in the Upper Austrian party administration, he took over the job in St. Veit/Glan, training Carinthian Socialist Party youth. With

- 1 Biographical information can best be gleaned from Joseph Buttinger’s “Erlebnisbericht und Lebenslauf des österreichischen Historikers Josef Buttinger”, File 2761, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), Vienna, and in his and his wife Muriel Gardiner’s autobiographical writings, see Joseph Buttinger, *Ortswechsel. Geschichte meiner Jugend*, Vienna 1979; Muriel Gardiner / Joseph Buttinger, *Damit wir nicht vergessen. Unsere Jahre 1934–1947 in Wien, Paris und New York*, Vienna 1978; the best biographical sketch is Philipp Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan or How Joseph Buttinger Became Joe Buttinger*, in: Günter Bischof / Ferdinand Karhofer / Eva Maltschnig (eds.), *Austrian Lives (Contemporary Austrian Studies 21)*, New Orleans–Innsbruck 2012, pp. 92–122.
- 2 Marie Jahoda, “Ich habe die Welt nicht verändert”. *Lebenserinnerungen einer Pionierin der Sozialforschung*, Frankfurt/M. 1997, p. 53.

the Great Depression and the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and Fascism in Austria, his work as a party organizer became more difficult. After the Dollfuss’ Austrofascist regime’s attacks on Social Democratic Party installations on the fateful February 12, 1934, the Socialists were forced underground. The “old” Viennese Party leadership under Otto Bauer moved to Brno/Brünn in Czechoslovakia to continue the work of the party-in-exile; Buttinger was thrown in jail for spreading underground pamphlets.³

Dismissed from jail he moved to Vienna and continued his underground work for the Party. He joined the “new” leadership of the “Revolutionary Socialists” in the *Zentralkomitee*. After a secret party conference in December 1934, the Party was raided again and more leaders were being jailed. Buttinger took over the Revolutionary Socialists Party leadership in Vienna with four other younger radicals. They separated themselves from the Communists and continued an intense struggle for the hearts and minds of Socialist workers who were increasingly attracted to the Austrian Nazis (also outlawed and operating underground).⁴ In 1934 Buttinger met the American medical student Muriel Gardiner. The American Gardiner was supportive of the underground Radical Socialist movement and provided safe houses in the city and the Vienna Woods. Gardiner (née Morris) came from a wealthy Chicago family and became Buttinger’s lover. Next to his dangerous underground work of publishing party pamphlets and newsletters and maintaining contact with the “old” party leaders in Brno, his girlfriend Gardiner supported Buttinger and improved his life style.⁵ Various vacation trips abroad with Gardiner allowed Buttinger to escape the tightening clutches of the Austrofascist regime.⁶

3 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 100–104. On Austrian Social Democrats and the traumatic events of February 1934, see Anson Rabinbach (ed.), *The Austrian Socialist Experiment. Social Democracy and Austromarxism, 1918–1934*, Boulder–London 1985; from Joseph Buttinger’s perspective, see: *In the Twilight of Socialism. A History of the Revolutionary Socialists of Austria*, New York 1953, pp. 1–19; from Bruno Kreisky’s perspective, see the longest chapter in his memoirs: *Zwischen den Zeiten. Der Memoiren erster Teil*, Berlin 1986, pp. 198–249.

4 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 104–106; Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism*, pp. 20–123.

5 Marie Jahoda charges that with Gardiner’s money he lived high on the hog “in grand luxury – he failed to adjust in his transition from extreme poverty to extreme wealth”; she suggests that this life style “changed his character” and alienated him from socialism. This sounds like sour grapes – Jahoda was envious of Buttinger’s good fortune. Once in the U.S. Buttinger left the Socialist movement behind and criticized it in his book “*The Twilight of Socialism*”, see Jahoda, *Lebenserinnerungen*, p. 53.

6 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 106–110; Muriel Gardiner, *Code Name “Mary”. Memoirs of an American Woman in the Austrian Underground*, New Haven 1983, pp. 46–87.

When the Hitler's armies invaded Austria on March 12, 1938, Buttinger managed to get out of Austria on March 12 and move via Switzerland to Paris. He had pleaded strongly with Revolutionary Socialist party friends to leave Austria prior to the "Anschluss."⁷ Revolutionary Socialists such as Buttinger did not support Social Democratic and union leaders who advocated support of the Schuschnigg regime under severe pressure from the Third Reich – after Schuschnigg's fateful trip to see Hitler in Berchtesgaden on February 12, 1938.⁸ Such a "national unity" political consolidation might have strengthened Austria and saved it from Nazi takeover.



**Muriel Gardiner,
1941**

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Buttinger continued his political work for the party in Paris and quickly was elected chairman of the Board of Austrian Socialists Abroad (*Auslandsvertretung der Österreichischen Sozialisten*). He wrote more pamphlets and edited and wrote for the party organ *Der Sozialistische Kampf*. But he quickly became fed up with the endless party bickering and infighting over doctrine and policy, namely how to keep Austrian Socialism alive abroad under difficult circumstances.⁹ His girlfriend Muriel Gardiner stayed behind in Vienna to help dozens of Austrian Socialists (many of them Jews) to escape the Nazi regime. She finished her medical studies at the University of Vienna and was very busy doing "refugee work", providing the necessary papers (begging for affidavits from U.S. friends and family) for Austrian emigrants to get American, British, or

7 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 110 f.; Gardiner, Code Name "Mary", pp. 132–164.

8 Young Bruno Kreisky, another Socialist youth leader, advocated such a "national unity" strategy, see Kreisky, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, pp. 280 f.

9 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 110–114.

Czechoslovak visas. She brought people to consulates and railroad stations. She went to Czechoslovakia to smuggle false passports back to Austria – stuffed onto her body under a corset – for illegal underground Socialists and Jews. More often than not she was extremely generous with her personal wealth and gave them cash gifts to take a train out of the country to get to Italy or Switzerland and from there to a safe haven in the Netherlands, or Great Britain, or the United States.¹⁰

On March 13, Hitler announced the incorporation of the *Ostmark* into the Third Reich; Berlin tightened its grip on the Austrians. Austrian Nazis intensified the persecution of their Jewish neighbors; they humiliated them and greedily seized their property and belongings (“aryanizing” everything from apartments to cars to valuable art and jewelry).¹¹ The radicalization of the persecution of Austrian Jews made Vienna the “model” for the *Altreich* in the coordinated approach of “racial ideology and economic rationalization.”¹²

Buttinger battled his party comrades in their Paris Socialist emigration office (as a result of these dissonances they failed to form an Austrian government-in-exile); this made him “tired and depressed.”¹³ Gardiner finished her admirable and brave “refugee work” in Vienna and came to Paris to delve ever more deeply into helping refugees. The French authorities made it more difficult from day to day to finish the necessary paperwork to acquire refugee visas to leave the country. As she put it in her memoirs: “I was also kept busy writing to American and English friends, begging for more affidavits and assistance for refugees.”¹⁴ She returned to Zurich and Austria, acting as an underground agent to communicate with Austrian Socialists still that were living in the country, experiencing some close calls with Gestapo agents. Muriel Gardiner also travelled back to the United States to take her New York State medical examinations for board certification.¹⁵ Soon after arriving in Paris, Joseph Buttinger and Muriel

10 Gardiner, Code Name “Mary”, pp. 88–131; Gardiner / Buttinger, *Damit wir nicht vergessen*, pp. 72–115.

11 Günter Bischof, *Austria’s Loss – America’s Gain. Finis Austriae – The “Anschluss” and the Expulsion/Migration of Jewish Austrians to the U.S.*, in: *Idem, Relationships/Beziehungsgeschichten. Austria and the United States in the Twentieth Century (Transatlantica 4)*, Innsbruck 2014, pp. 57–82.

12 Götz Aly / Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung*, Frankfurt/M. 1991, pp. 233–49 (quotations pp. 33, 43); Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve. The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War*, New York 2012, pp. 361–408.

13 Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism*, pp. 491–531 (quotation S. 496).

14 Gardiner, Code Name “Mary”, pp. 132–138 (quotation S. 137).

15 *Ibidem*, pp. 138–148.

Gardiner decided to get married in 1938. Marriage to an American would also make it easier for Buttinger to get a spousal visa to enter the U. S. They had to cut through considerable red tape with French authorities and needed the help of former Socialist Premier Léon Blum to be able to finally get married in the summer of 1939.¹⁶

The war started in Europe with Hitler's attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. The French government responded by locking up "enemy alien" refugees in internment camps (Fascists next to Socialist anti-Nazis). Within a week Buttinger and other Austrian Socialist refugees were locked up in a camp in Meslay. Terrible conditions prevailed for inmates in Meslay and other such internment camps. Receiving little food and hardly any water, they were packed into these camps "like sardines", sleeping in open meadows in the wet grass without blankets and shelter from the weather.¹⁷ After much agitation on Muriel's part, she got her husband "Joe" released after a few weeks.

Joe and Muriel Buttinger at last sailed to the United States from Bordeaux in mid-November 1939 on the S.S. *Manhattan*, the last American ship to leave France. In New York Buttinger resigned from his leadership position of the Austrian Socialists Abroad. The constant partisan bickering, and backstabbing, as well as the defeatism amongst the emigrant circles had worn him down. Emigration had become the "talking shop of those who were politically lost". He considered political emigrants "the real victims of the catastrophes of our times." Emigration, he felt now represented "the demise of the democratic and socialist forces in Europe."¹⁸ Before he left Paris he had "the realization that all was lost, that a war would come and that would fulfill none of his hope, and would finally shatter all the great expectations of his life."¹⁹

Once in New York, Joe Buttinger threw himself into "refugee work" with the same reckless abandon that formerly he had devoted to the grand idea of socialism. Before Hitler's invasion of France, he and his wife Muriel lobbied the administration of Franklin Roosevelt to put pressure on the French government to improve conditions in the dismal internment camps and to release the internees.²⁰ He published a report on the inhuman conditions that he personally had experienced in Meslay in the *Nation* magazine (the *New York Times* had declined

16 Ibidem, p. 149.

17 Ibidem, pp. 153–156. On France response to the refugee crisis of 1938–40, see Vicky Caron, *Uneasy Asylum. France and Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942*, Stanford 1999.

18 "Hubert" Buttinger, letter to anonymous "old" socialist, mid-March 1942, File 2761, DÖW.

19 Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism*, p. 520.

20 They called them "concentration camps", see Gardiner / Buttinger, *Damit wir nicht vergessen*, p. 151.

to publish it as a letter to the editor). He became active in the “International Relief Association” (later more famous under the name “International Rescue Commission”). After the Nazi invasion and occupation of France in May 1940, Buttinger’s refugee work concentrated on getting Jewish refugees out of the country that had fled to Southern France. He supported the “International Refugee Committee” (formerly the “Emergency Rescue Committee”) by forming a committee with German refugees in New York to collect money to support Varian Fry and the IRC in Southern France. Fry secured papers and funds for refugees to make it through a quasi-underground railroad” through Spain to neutral Portugal and from there to the United States.²¹

Joe and Muriel Buttinger personally lobbied the President’s wife Eleanor Roosevelt to put pressure on the White House and Congress to grant 200



Friedrich Adler and Muriel Gardiner, 1942

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21 Ibidem, p. 152. Buttinger’s role with the emergency visa program is recognized by DÖW (ed.), *Österreicher im Exil. USA 1938–1945. Eine Dokumentation*, 2 vols., Vienna 1995, here vol. 1, pp. 25 f.

“emergency visa” for the most endangered Jewish refugees in France. The visa were granted and the Greek ship *New Hellas* brought a load of refugees from Southern France to New York, among them Buttinger’s Socialist colleagues who had been interned in French camps.²² Once old comrades like Friedrich Adler arrived in New York, the Buttingers gave Austrian German, Russian and Hungarian refugees cash gifts, provided them with apartments and invited some of them to stay for weeks in their Park Street apartment.²³ Muriel generously providing thousands of dollars from her family fortune, the Buttingers personally engaged in private refugee work throughout the war by paying for refugees’ ship passage to the U. S., funding apartments, looking for jobs, paying college tuition for refugee children, and advancing loans for some acquaintances who started small businesses.²⁴ Meanwhile Joe Buttinger continued his work on the International Rescue Committee.

The Buttingers intense work for and astounding generosity towards Austrian and other refugees can be easily traced through the rich collection of Buttinger papers deposited at the *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes* in Vienna.²⁵ In December 1940, for example, the Buttingers worked hard on getting Austrian émigrés in Sweden to the U. S. They collected two affidavits each for Bruno Kreisky, Otto Binder, Rudolf Anzenböck in Sweden and Paul Malles in Canada. They deposited \$ 4,400 in bank accounts for these refugees to live on for a year once they arrived in the U.S. as well as \$ 1,600 for trip expenses. Muriel wrote a letter to the State Department to urge them to provide visas for these refugees under the quota numbers.²⁶ Bruno Kreisky acknowledges in his memoirs that Buttinger urged him to come to the U. S. and had a visa ready and trip booked (with the Transsiberian Railroad via Vladivostok and Japan). But Kreisky decided to stay in Sweden and not be “in

22 See also Richard Breitman / Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews*, Cambridge/MA 2013.

23 Ibidem, p. 154 f.

24 See the detailed files on American Express transfers (with copies of checks) to dozens of émigrés (listed by name) in France, England, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden and Mexico, and tuition payments for students in American colleges, and business loans to acquaintances, Files 18893/3 and 18893/4, DÖW.

25 While Muriel Morris Buttinger deposited the Buttinger Papers dealing with Austrian Socialism and the World War II period of aiding refugees at the DÖW in 1985 (personal e-mail Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider to author, October 17, 2016), the Buttinger’s papers relating to his later work on Vietnam were donated to Harvard-Yenching Library at Harvard University in 1984 (see <http://guides.library.harvard.edu/c.php?g=310143&p=2074093> [accessed October 22, 2016]). The best collection of documents on the Austrian exile in the U.S. during World War II is DÖW (ed.), *Österreicher im Exil, USA*.

26 See the documentation (including copies of letters, affidavits and expenses) in the file 18886/3, DÖW.

flight” again (and hide in the Swedish forests should the Nazis take over the country).²⁷

The case of Socialist lawyer Ernst Lachs and his wife Minna and son Thomas, stuck in Switzerland, speaks volumes about the challenges of achieving success in getting Jewish refugees out of Europe. Lachs was surviving in Zurich with odd jobs and support from the local Jewish community in Zurich while the Buttingers worked hard to secure a visa for his family. The consul in Zurich did not deem the affidavits for the Lachs family secure enough to guarantee his existence in the U. S. (“the evidence submitted [...] is not found adequate to overcome the public charge provision”). Only in 1941 did the consul in Zurich relent and grant a visa. In August Lachs 1941 and his family were on the steamer *Navemar* from Lisbon to New York.²⁸

The Buttingers generous private charity work continued after the war. They sent hundreds of CARE packages to dozens of starving Austrian families, sometimes distant acquaintances. They sent CARE packages to families all over Europe, eventually dispatching a CARE package to a list of 100 families once a month. The dispatched CARE packages as late as 1948 when the food situation in Austria was improving but recipients were deeply grateful for such aid. The “thank you” letters from recipients of CARE packages to the Buttingers in the files of the DÖW (some 2,500 such letters) are ample evidence for people’s appreciation of their generosity. These “love gifts” (“*Liebesgaben*”) brought relief in the “terrible” postwar years. The Buttingers were “noble” and “saviors” to hundreds of people starving and living in misery.²⁹

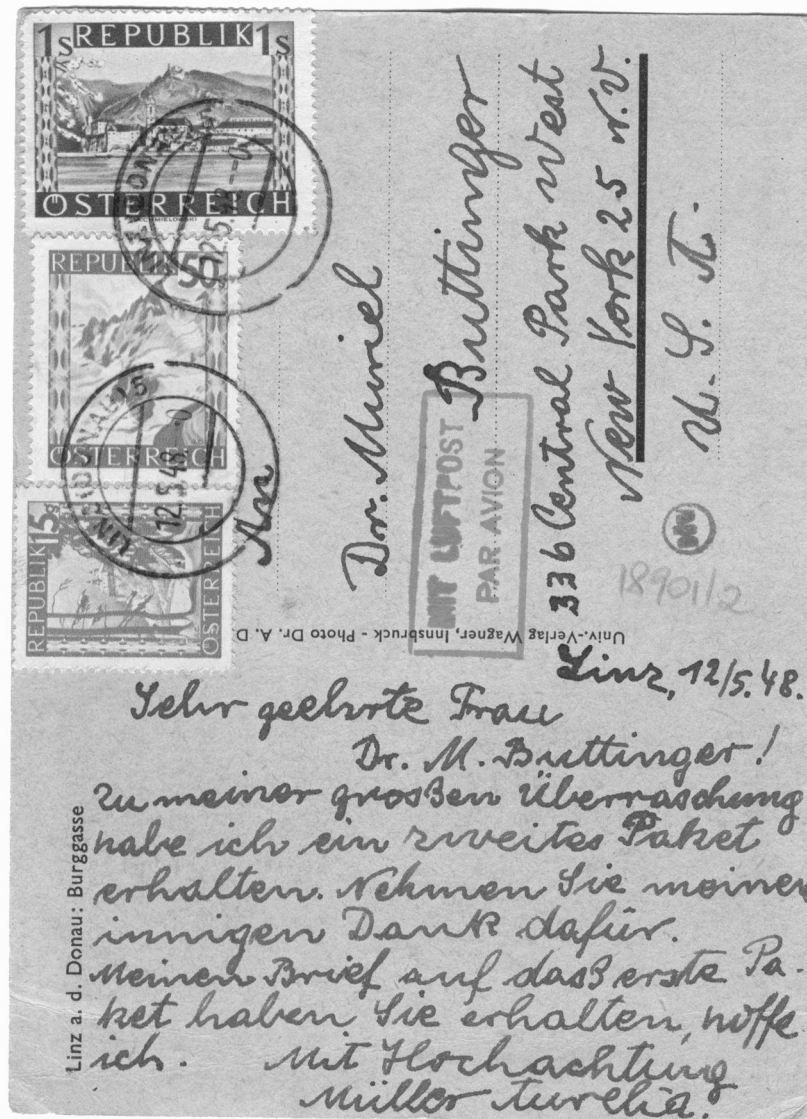
The Buttingers also continued their “refugee work” for the International Rescue Committee. The IRC dispatched Muriel to Paris to organize the rescue of refugees (frequently “Displaced Persons”) from Germany, Austria, Italy and Franco’s Spain. They needed financial assistance and visas to return to their home countries. Joe Buttinger went back to Europe in October 1945 to continue Muriel’s work for the IRC. As the European director of the IRC (headquartered in Geneva) he helped thousands of refugees, especially anti-fascists who had

27 Kreisky, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, p. 316.

28 On route to New York, Mrs. Lachs pleaded with Mrs. Buttinger to help her mother get out of Belgium and to the U.S., see letters Coulter (Acting Chief, Visa Division, State Dept.) to Adolf Sturmthal, August 26, 1940, and Eichhorn to Buttinger, August 21, 1941, File 18880/5, DÖW; on Lisbon during World War II, see Neal Lochery, *Lisbon. War in the Shadows of the City Light, 1939–1945*, New York 2012. Lachs returned to Austria in 1947 to work as an auditor and eventually chief comptroller for the City of Vienna.

29 These letters are in files 18895/5-11, DÖW, see also Gardiner / Buttinger, *Damit wir nicht vergessen*, pp. 161–166.

spent time in concentration camps get out of Europe. He worked for the IRC in Europe until March 1947.³⁰



“Thank you” letter from a recipient of CARE packages to Muriel Buttinger, 1948

DÖW Fotosammlung 9338

30 Ibidem, pp. 159 f.

Joe Buttinger continued his professional humanitarian refugee work for the IRC by helping North Vietnamese and Hungarian refugees resettle. After the Geneva Conference of 1954 that divided the country, a million North Vietnamese refugees fled to South Vietnam and needed help. His experience in Saigon launched Buttinger on his new passion of studying and writing about Vietnamese history. In 1956, some 200,000 Hungarians fled their country across the border to Austria after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Some 30,000 eventually resettled in the U. S. The Buttingers once more continued their personal support for Hungarian refugees after the Revolution of 1956. Like in 1940/41 they made their New York apartment available for refugees and were generous with personal funds to help Hungarian refugees start a new life in the United States.³¹

Joe Buttinger did not return to Austria after World War II. As suggested above, he and his wife Muriel lived up to their Socialist ideals by doing “refugee work”; they shared their wealth by supporting numerous families with CARE packages. Why would someone in a comfortable and well-to-do position like Buttinger want to return to post-World War II Austria, hungry, depressed, and facing the reconstruction of its economy and polity? He had abandoned his dedication to the “Party” when he reached his new exile in New York in 1940. The Austrian Social Democratic emigration communities in Paris and New York had spent their days bickering and infighting. They had abandoned the high hopes that Buttinger (“Richter” in his *Twilight of Socialism* account) and the Revolutionary Socialists had for launching a revolution and construction of a socialist society. “Old school” Austrian Socialists relaunched the “Social Democratic” Party (SPÖ) after the war. Most “no longer cared about Socialist principles”, Buttinger felt after his visit in 1947. Those from his prewar Revolutionary Socialist movement who returned had become “bureaucrats” who had abandoned their socialism. Like in other parts of Europe, Buttinger concluded, “a true Socialist movement ceased to exist.”³²

Other Socialist émigrés in the U. S. (and England) like Adolf Sturmthal who visited Vienna in 1947, considering the return of émigrés, found out that they were not really welcomed by those Socialists who had seized the reins of power in Vienna (in the party and the government). Those who had survived the Nazi regime in Austria, did not want to share their positions (or their status) with emigrants who had spent the war in relative safety in New York or London. Some SPÖ leaders continued to be anti-Semitic after the war and did not care

31 Strobl, *Thinking Cosmopolitan*, pp. 117 f.

32 Buttinger, *In the Twilight of Socialism*, pp. 543 f.

for Jewish Socialists to return. After long conversations with Party leaders such as Vice-Chancellor Adolf Schärf and Oskar Pollak (the editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* before and after the war), Sturmthal came to the conclusion that they separated émigrés in three groups. One group of old Socialists like Wilhelm Ellenbogen they did not mind returning since they no longer threatened anyone's job. The second group of people like Moritz Robinson they did not want to return. The third group of Party "theoreticians" like Sturmthal and Benedikt Kautsky were needed and would have been welcomed back.³³

I suspect Joe Buttinger would have belonged to the second group. He was young smart, and energetic enough to have made a mark in the postwar SPÖ, had he returned. The Jewish Socialist Bruno Kreisky returned from his Swedish exile after the war and became Chancellor; he apparently "once mused that Mr. Buttinger was such a hero that if he had returned, he would have become chancellor."³⁴

33 Adolf Sturmthal, *Zwei Leben. Erinnerungen eines sozialistischen Internationalisten zwischen Österreich und den USA*, Wien 1989, pp. 212–215.

34 See the obituary by Bruce Lambert, Joseph A. Buttinger, Nazi Fighter and Vietnam Scholar, Dies at 85, *New York Times*, March 8, 1992 (<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/nyregion/joseph-a-buttinger-nazi-fighter-and-vietnam-scholar-dies-at-85.html> [accessed October 23, 2016]). Marie Jahoda's fellow Socialist émigrés in London wanted her to return to Vienna and accused her of "desertion" when she moved to New York in 1945 to be with her daughter; an interviewer for Austrian television later told her that he regretted her not returning for "she could have become Chancellor," see Jahoda, "Ich habe die Welt nicht verändert", pp. 79, 85.