

**FAMOUS EVENTS: What happened on ... ?
Was ist am 15. Mai 1955 geschehen?**

Austria's Independence Day / Österreichs Staatsfeiertag

**THE EXAMPLE OF AUSTRIA
25 YEARS STATE TREATY**

The end of the Second World War in spring 1945 meant for Austria chaos, destruction, hunger, a situation which initially almost swamped the joy and relief at liberation from Nazi domination, at the country's resurrection, and at the termination of the senseless bloodshed. When it came down to details, nobody knew how things were to go on. The only possible motto was reconstruction, reconstruction of an Austrian administration, reconstruction of the nearly totally destroyed industry, reconstruction of the wholly smashed economy, reconstruction of the houses and homes which the hail of bombs and the ground-fighting had either levelled to their foundations or at best cruelly damaged, and the provision of the population with the basic needs of daily life. Above all, there was the struggle against hunger, particularly a problem in the larger towns because all normal means of

communication, and therefore of food supplies, had broken down.

A few figures will give some notion as regards the extent of the damage caused by the war and of the victims it had claimed: 290,000 homes, 112,000 of them in Vienna alone, were destroyed or uninhabitable; 247,000 Austrian members of the Wehrmacht had been killed or were recorded as "missing" while another 166,000 had been wounded, in part severely; the civilian population numbered 104,000 dead; hundreds of thousands of Austrians were prisoners of war (306,000 had returned by the end of 1946 from the US, 211,000 from Great Britain, 67,000 from France, and 162,000 from the Soviet Union by December 1947, to be followed by several special transports from there, the last of which arrived in Vienna on June 25, 1955.)

The reconstruction could clearly be accomplished only by cooperation between all Austrians. The political prerequisites, after a Provisional Government under Karl Renner had coped with the early and especially difficult months, were created by the General Election of November 25, 1945. The ÖVP (Österreichische Volkspartei, international equivalent = Christian Democrats) won 85 seats, the SPÖ (Sozialistische Partei Österreichs, international equivalent = Social Democrats) 76 seats, and the KPÖ (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs = Austrian Communist Party) 4 seats. For more than twenty years, until 1966, politics in Austria were shaped by the "Grand Coalition", i.e., collaboration between the two largest political groups supported by the overwhelming majority of their countrymen. Even if this collaboration, particularly after 1955, did sometimes show symptoms of more or less serious tension, the services that it rendered are beyond dispute.

Until 1955 two objectives were perfectly manifest—economic reconstruction, to ensure the achievement of a halfway acceptable standard of living for all Austrians, and the conclusion of a State Treaty which would reestablish Austria's freedom and complete sovereignty. The presence of the four Great Powers' Occupation Forces, the division of the country into zones of occupation, the control over legislation and administration by the Allied Council in Vienna, daily made it obvious that, although in the course of the years the whole occupation regime became less strict; Austria, free in theory, in reality continued to be an occupied country with all the restrictions entailed by this fact.

The tug-of-war over the State Treaty, lasting years on end, was held by the Austrian people to be an undeserved protraction of the complete freedom to which they felt entitled. They had indeed to resign themselves to seeing that there was little they could do to speed the negotiations and that actual progress was dependent on the international situation, on mitigation of the distrust between the Great Powers, and on an end to the Cold War. There was hardly anything more that the Austrian side could attempt other than repeatedly to urge a continuation of the negotiations and, for the rest, to await a favorable juncture which would perhaps cause a favorable decision.

In spring 1955 this juncture at last seemed to have arrived. Its timely recognition, and to have seized the opportunities that it offered, may perhaps be called Austria's share in the materialization of the State Treaty.



Prisoners of war met with a stormy welcome