

Roller - Hitler - Bick

Who – in German speaking countries - does not know the children's rhyme: "hätte, hätte, Fahrradkette"? It is meant to show children that the subjunctive is a speculation and that on many paths in life there are forks with decisions where one can decide one way or another - and, had one decided differently, even the path of life might have been different. But just, would have (hätte), would have (hätte)....

Alfred Roller, the sender of the letter, was born in Brno in 1864. At the age of 20 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna; in 1897 he was a co-founder of the Vienna Secession, and from 1902 its president. Around 1900 Roller is also director at the Technical School for Wood Industry in Villach, Carinthia. From 1903 he is director of set design at the Vienna State Opera; he is responsible for the set design for the new production of Tristan und Isolde in 1903. At the same time he works with Gustav Mahler at the Vienna Court Opera - the scenic art reaches a new peak with the interaction of space, color, light, music, words and gestures. From 1909 he also worked as a stage designer at the Vienna Burgtheater and was responsible for Richard Strauss premieres (Fig. 1; letter from Roller to Bick).



Fig. 1: Letter of Prof. Roller to Hofrat J. Bick from 1925 [Inflation franking – 1.500 Kronen]

After moving from Linz to Vienna, Adolf Hitler wanted an apprenticeship with Alfred Roller in 1908. Various biographers disagree at this point - Variant 1: Hitler received a letter of recommendation from an acquaintance in Linz to make an appearance at Roller. Roller received the young Hitler and "passed" him on to the painter and sculptor Rudolf Panholzer. - Variant 2: Hitler lets the opportunity to meet Roller pass. He had already made an appearance at the Court Opera, but leaves, so that another meeting with Roller

does not take place. The paths of the two did not cross again until Hitler had already become Reich Chancellor.

The recipient of the letter, Josef Bick, has a more and less pleasant relationship with both: with Roller it will probably be official. Bick has been director of the state art collection Albertina since 1934 and he is director general of the then National Library in Vienna; he came to this position in 1907 via the Court Library; Bick works on the Greek papyrus collection. During World War I he is exempted from military service; he is promoted within the Court Library as ao. professor in 1914 (renamed National Library in 1919) and in 1918 to vice-director. Because of this, many persons were hostile against him.

Austria becomes small in 1919, it is supposed to become German Austria - Bolsheviks, Freemasons, liberals and Jews are identified as preventers. In the 1920s, positions in public life are given to members of the "German Community" (an association in which Catholics and German nationalists find each other, students close to the ÖCV connections and the elites of the bourgeois camp). Nationals feel left behind the Catholics and join the German Club, founded in 1908. In 1923, Bick is appointed director of the National Library. In 1926 he becomes a consultant to the Federal Ministry of Education, and in 1931 he is highly decorated and becomes a member of the Academy of Sciences. After armed struggles break out in February 1934, the Social Democratic Party is banned. As a result, the workers' libraries were also confiscated; Bick was able to obtain access to the holdings of these institutions for the National Library. Decomposing literature by de Quiroz, Sinclair, Kisch, Döblin, Stern, Roda-Roda, Traven, Zola, Glaeser, London, Busch, are to be removed immediately. This year also sees the installation of the Federal Cultural Council and the appointment of Bick as representative of the scientific institutions; he becomes its president, which at the same time brings Bick into the Bundestag as second vice president. The government can override decisions of the Bundestag through its Enabling Act. The content of the letter carried remains unknown to us - on the other hand, we know Bick's fate:



Fig. 2: Letter from the Federal Ministry of Education to Director General Bick at the National Library, Vienna, from 1935 - forwarded to Piesting.

On March 16, 1938, the Nazis having marched into Vienna, he is arrested away from his desk in the Vienna National Library - he is sent to the Vienna Gestapo prison, later to the Dachau concentration camp [prisoner number 13,790], then to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He spends weeks in solitary confinement. In an interrogation he is accused of having given manuscripts [The Black Prayer Book] from the National Library to Pope Pius XI [DOCUMENTATION ARCHIVE OF THE AUSTRIAN RESISTANCE retrieved 04/30/2021] or to Pius XII [WIKIPEDIA on Josef XII]. [WIKIPEDIA on Josef Bick retrieved 04/30/2021].

August 28, he was initially released from both the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and the civil service in Vienna and forced to remain under house arrest - without pay - at his home in Piesting (Fig. 2) in Lower Austria. In a letter (1940), Bick points out that he had never publicly opposed the NSDAP and that he "as a conscious anti-Semite had always worked where it was necessary to fight Jewish influence. No less a person than Reich Minister Dr. Seyß-Inquart will be able to confirm that I stood by him as a reliable collaborator in the post-war years, when the Red Jew was striving for autocracy in Vienna and Austria."



Fig. 3: Letter from Vienna to Piesting dated 12.3.1945. At the beginning of April, the Soviet troops are outside Vienna; one month after posting this letter, Vienna is conquered by the Russians; already on April 4, Karl Renner offers Josef Stalin his services for a refoundation of Austria, whose "future unquestionably belongs to socialism," according to Renner.

Bick spent the war years in Piesting (Fig. 3). After the war, Bick was reappointed to his old position at the Vienna National Library. One of his first measures was to rename it the Austrian National Library; the institution still bears this name today.

On March 20, 1946, the National Council in Vienna passes the Literature Purification Act. A central commission is to be installed to combat Nazi literature. All public and private libraries, bookstores, department stores and publishing houses are to be searched, and the literature is to be collected centrally in the National Library and stamped out [67 tons]. The Prohibition Act of 1947 prohibits the possession of

Nazi literature. The Literature Purification Law is repeatedly challenged either by Parliament or the Allied Council until 1949, when it is finally rejected. Bick is appointed to the Central Commission for Combating Nazi Literature as its chairman. The consequences for authors on the banned list were severe: expiatory levies, dismissal from public-law employment, no severance pay, no pension or provision for dependents, exclusion from all leading positions in business and associations, exclusion from the right to stand for election, prohibition of certain professions, such as accountant, tax advisor, building manager, tourist accommodation, lawyer or notary, doctor, caterer, artist, or prohibition of all professions involved in the production or trade of literary products. Well-known authors were Heimto von Doderer and Ernst Jünger.



Fig. 4: Around 1815, rockets and explosives are produced in the area south of the city of Wiener Neustadt - the area is called Feuerwerksanstalt. During the First World War, the largest munitions factory in the monarchy is built. During the Ständestaat, the detention camp Wöllersdorf is established in the industrial complex; in 1938, Trutzdorf is added to the place name. After 1945, the village was renamed Wöllersdorf again.

How was it possible that "Hitler's helpers", the National Socialist regime, could be so familiar with the conditions in Austria, and could arrest people practically on the first day of their seizure of power? The answer is simple: long before the invasion, there are illegals [National Socialists] in Austria: they report Republic loyalists, Jews, fellow travelers and comrades-in-arms to Munich and Berlin. Moreover, as early as 1933, during the period of the Austrian corporative state, dossiers are created on Austrian citizens by the "Vaterländische Front" (VF) in "Dienststellenorganisationen" (DO). Based on these dossiers, illegal Nazis were imprisoned in the Wöllersdorf detention camp, an adapted industrial complex (Fig. 4), starting in January 1934. After the invasion of 1938, these dossiers were now instrumental for the new "masters", who were able to use them to obtain information about the attitudes of many Austrians. Apparently, the Vaterländische Front had even established an office in the National Library; thus, the louse sat right in the middle of the fur and could inform itself about the ideological position of the officials - and also of the director - on the spot (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Letter of Hans Mzik to a service of the Patriotic Front in the National Library: H. Mzik was born in Galicia - probably his Polish origin will be his undoing in 1938; he will be removed from his service by the National Socialists and put into permanent retirement. He was a private lecturer in Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Vienna. His best-known work (1933) is entitled: *The Journey of the Arab Ibn Batuta through India and China* [quoted from *Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus der Universität Wien 1938*].

Murray G. Hall (2004) mentions in the catalog for the exhibition "*Looted Books. The Austrian National Library Confronts Its Nazi Past*," which was shown in the State Hall of the Austrian National Library from December 2004 to February 2005, in his article "*On the Role of the National Library in the Liquidation of Social Democratic Educational Institutions from 1934 onward*" the involvement of Director General Josef Bick in the purge of libraries under the Austrofascism: "The National Library under GD [Director General] Josef Bick was directly and decisively involved in this purge of Austrian library holdings under the Ständestaat, at the latest since the spring of 1935 - as an executive organ of the Ministry of Education. The behavior of the Director General Josef Bick, who was reinstated in 1945, was also not glorious when he asked an aggrieved book collector to forego restitution in favor of the Austrian National Library. Restitution would be "fraught with unsurmountable difficulties," according to Hall & al. 2006.

Literature:

- Brandstetter C.M.: *Exponate der Trilogie „Österreich gegen Hitler“ (Engelbert Dollfuss, Kurt Schuschnigg & Der Anschluss Österreichs)*. - Exponat: „Jan Karski – allein gegen die Endlösung“.
- Fechter B. 2013: *Josef Bick – Versuch einer Monographie – Diplomarbeit Univ. Wien*.
- Hall M. G., C. Köstner & M. Werner (Hrsg) 2004: *Geraubte Bücher. Die Österreichische Nationalbibliothek stellt sich ihrer NS-Vergangenheit*. - Wien: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.
- Hall, M. G. & C. Köstner 2006: „...allerlei für die Nationalbibliothek zu ergattern...“. *Eine österreichische Institution in der NS-Zeit*. Wien, Köln u.a. Böhlau Verlag, S. 14.
- Wagner C. 2005: *Die Zentralkommission zur Bekämpfung der NS-Literatur - Literaturreinigung auf Österreichisch. Diplomarbeit Univ. Wien*.