

Dr Karl Renner - 65th anniversary of his death

By A Taylor

Karl Renner was born on 14th December 1870 in Unter-Tannowitz (or Dolni-Dunajovice), a Moravian market town north of Nikolsburg (or Mikulov), the nearest large town some 8km distant. He was the tenth son of Matthäus and Marie Habinger Renner, who were farmers. The family had to struggle for its very existence, so he had a hard but not joyless youth. His cleverness and eagerness to learn were noticed by his teachers in the village school, and they urged his father to let this very talented youngster continue his studies. Matthäus ventured the attempt despite the ever more hard-pressed material circumstances into which the family came, due to poor harvests and the unfavourable economic development of agriculture in the 1870s.

Since the hoped-for free tuition in the Piarist gymnasium in Nikolsburg fell through, the whole plan was in danger of failure after just a few weeks. But the tough will to self-assertion of the 11-year old won out! Since the paternal home could provide only a roof over his head and a scant measure of daily bread, the small boy walked day after day, summer and winter, morning and evening, in all kinds of weather for two hours from his native village to school in Nikolsdorf, and back. This was an almost superhuman demand on an undernourished child, but perhaps the precondition for the robust health which Karl Renner enjoyed into his "ripe old age".

He obtained a position in the Library of the Imperial Council and after studying law at the University of Vienna he obtained the degree of Doktor juris in the spring of 1896. Whilst still a student he married his wife Luise, and the pair remained devoted to each other till his death. Influenced mainly by his parents he became a member of the Social Democratic Party, then led by Viktor Adler.

Opposed to the Habsburg monarchy, Dr. Renner was prominent as a party leader and was elected as deputy to the National Assembly in 1908. He thought deeply about the social and political problems of his times. His publications were nationalistic, in line with the trend of the period. His "Fight of the Austrian Tribes and the State", "Principles of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy" and "Marxism" were followed by "The Self-Determination of Nations".

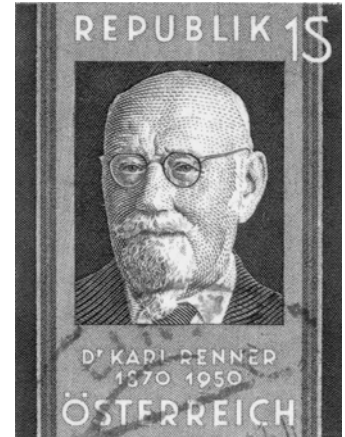


After the "declaration" of the Emperor Karl on 11 November 1918 and the proclamation of the "Democratic Republic of German Austria" on the 12th, Karl Seitz became Head of State and Dr. Renner formed the first, temporary Cabinet of the Austrian Republic. In the elections in February 1919, Dr. Renner's party emerged as the largest representation in the National Constitutional Assembly and he became the first State Chancellor of the young republic. It was this temporary entity which negotiated and signed the Peace Treaty at St. Germain with the Allies on 10 September 1919. A new coalition government was formed in which Dr. Renner added to the Chancellorship the portfolio of Foreign affairs. When that coalition was dissolved, he continued as Foreign Minister until he resigned in October 1919. The

Austrian Republic, formally recognised by the Allies, came into existence on 1 October 1920 and Dr. Michael Hainisch (1858-1940) was elected as its First President on 9 December 1920.

Elected to the National Assembly in 1920, Dr. Renner remained a member until 1934 and acted as its President from 1931 to 1933. He found time to write the words of the first national anthem for the First Austrian Republic, "Deutschösterreich, du herrliches Land"; the music is by the Austrian composer Wilhelm Kienzl (1857-1941).

On 20th May 1932 Dr. Engelbert Dollfuss became Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs with a parliamentary majority of one. In order to govern effectively, in the Autumn of 1932 he used a War Emergency power to deal with economic problems without reference to Parliament. A special session of Parliament in March



1933 was convened to discuss the measures necessary to deal with a railway strike. It ended in disorder when the President (i.e. Speaker) Dr. Renner, and the two Vice-Presidents resigned.

Dr. Renner was one of the Socialist leaders imprisoned in 1934 when the Dollfuss regime crushed the revolt of the Socialist workers by force and outlawed the Socialist party. Because of the lack of evidence against him, Dr. Renner was released a few months later and remained politically inactive during the following years when Austria under Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg drifted more and more into the Nazi camp.

Dr. Renner had supported Austria's union with Germany, declaring that "Austria has no future". With the rise of nazism, however, the question of Anschluss took on different aspects, and when Hitler's forces marched into Austria on March 13, 1938, Dr. Renner realised that he and those of like mind had fought a losing battle. He left his home in Vienna and went to live at Gloggnitz in Lower Austria.

Seven years later, on April 3rd 1945, he established contact with the Russian occupation forces that had marched into Austria, and on 20 April he was asked by the Russians to form the first Austrian Provisional Government and become its Chancellor. The new Government took office on 27 April; it was a coalition consisting of 10 Social Democrats, 7 Communists, 9 conservatives and 3 non-party representatives. The Declaration of Austrian Independence was issued, stating in part "The Democratic Republic of Austria is re-established and shall be conducted in the spirit of the constitution of 1920" - not, note, a reversion to the immediately pre-Anschluss situation - and "The Anschluss ... is null and void". Dr. Renner and his wife were provided by the Government with a house in the American zone of Vienna. Following a broadening to include all the provinces, Renner's Government was eventually (20 October 1945) recognized by the Allied occupation powers, and soon afterwards it issued the first call for elections in Austria in eleven years.



General elections were held on 25 November 1945, and on 20 December Dr. Renner was elected Federal President for a term of six years, thus giving him the rare distinction of being chosen twice for virtually the same office, both after a world war. He received the unanimous vote of the two houses of Parliament, representing all three parties, including the Communists. Later he moved into the famous Hofburg palace on the Ring, the first non-royal head of the Austrian state to govern from the previous residence of the Habsburgs.

The famed Renner Sheets (see below) celebrating the first year of the Second Republic were placed on sale for two days: on 5 September 1946 (to subscribers only, and only one set per person irrespective of what they'd asked for) and 6 September 1946 (to everybody else) – as usual, the authorising decree (see below) was dated 19 September and published on 3 October. They were available only at 10 selected offices, the Länder capitals plus Urfar, and were postally valid until 30 September. The surcharge went to the State; the decree didn't specify it but it was 100%. The face values were 1, 2, 3, 5 Sch plus a surcharge of the same amount and each sheet had 8 stamps surrounding a label: so one set cost you 176 Sch. The decree concludes by stating that you couldn't hand them back and reclaim your payment (this presumably to catch hard-up subscribers).

As President, Dr. Renner pleaded for the return to Austria of South Tyrol, condemned the zoning of Austria by the occupation powers, and asked for a reduction in the numbers of the occupation forces. He stressed political unity and disclaimed Pan-German aims, saying he had always been an internationalist.

Dr. Renner repeatedly made it plain he favoured the United Nations rather than the Communist brand of Internationalism, and consequently, when the Communist International was reorganized as the Communist Information Bureau at Warsaw in 1947, he was denounced as a "traitor to the working class". A few weeks later Dr. Renner called for an immediate peace treaty with Austria to "free her from imposed international entanglements" and to restore her sovereignty.



The idea that Austria should regain its independence and thereafter remain permanently neutral in foreign affairs had first surfaced in public in Jan 1947, when President Renner suggested it, and the Socialist Party formally adopted it as their policy. In 1951, Dr. Theodor Körner, then President of Austria, again proposed: "A free and independent Austria, removed from all rivalries and not tied to either side, but devoted only to the cause of peace, will be an asset for Europe and the world."

In 1948 Dr. Renner told the annual conference of Austrian trade unions that a one-party state cannot bring about social progress. He urged the delegates to adhere to democratic methods to obtain a "truly social state". He held up as a model the United States and Great Britain, which he said had drawn ahead of the rest of the world by change without revolution. In a 1949 radio appeal for admission of Austria to the United Nations, Dr. Renner said there was "no serious political group in Austria which covets anything but true, full and peaceful democracy". Soon afterward in 1949 the Austrian right-wing parties decisively defeated the Communists in the second postwar elections.

Dr. Karl Renner died on Saturday Dec 30th 1950. His body lay in state for two days in the Hofburg; he was buried in Vienna on Thursday January 4th 1951. He has appeared on several commemorative issues since.

Post- und Telegraphenverordnungsblatt Nr.13

Herausgegeben vom Bundesministerium für Verkehr,
Generaldirektion für die Post- und Telegraphenverwaltung. — Wien, den 3. Oktober 1946.

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| <p>I. 34. Herausgabe der Werte zu 15, 20, 45, 80 und 90 g der Landschaftsserie, sowie des in geänderter Farbe aufgelegten Wertes zu 8 g der gleichen Serie.</p> <p>35. Kleinbogen der Sonderpostmarkenserie mit dem Bildnis des Herrn Bundespräsidenten Dr. Karl Renner.</p> | <p>II. 23. Verlust von Formblatturschriften aus dem Banknotenumtausch.</p> <p>24. Verlust von Dienstausweisen.</p> <p>25. Auffindung eines Dienstausweises.</p> |
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35. Kleinbogen der Sonderpostmarkenserie mit dem Bildnis des Herrn Bundespräsidenten Dr. Karl Renner.*)

Am 5. und 6. September 1946 werden die Sonderpostmarken mit dem Bildnis des Herrn Bundespräsidenten Dr. Karl Renner in Kleinbogen herausgegeben.

Bei der auf Japandokumentenpapier gedruckten Ausgabe sind pro Kleinbogen je 8 Stück eines

*) Siehe Vfg. 24, P. u. TVBl. Nr. 10/1946.

Wertes um das von je einer Zierleiste flankierte und mit einer zweizeilig gehaltenen Inschrift „Ein Jahr befreites Österreich“ überdruckte österreichische Bundeswappen gruppiert; jeder Kleinbogen trägt überdies das Signum Professor Hans Ranzonis d. J., von dem Entwurf und Stich stammen.

Die Auflagenhöhe beträgt 20.000 Stück. Über den Ertrag des Zuschlages in der Höhe des Nennwertes verfügt die Bundesregierung.

Die Kleinbogen der Sonderpostmarkenserie mit dem Bildnis des Herrn Bundespräsidenten Dr. Karl Renner werden am 5. und 6. September 1946 nur an den Schaltern folgender Postämter abgegeben:

- für das Burgenland beim Postamt Eisenstadt,
- für Kärnten beim Postamt Klagenfurt 1,
- für Niederösterreich beim Postamt Wien 15,
- für das nördliche Oberösterreich beim Postamt Urfahr 1,
- für das südliche Oberösterreich beim Postamt Linz 1,
- für Salzburg beim Postamt Salzburg 4,
- für Steiermark beim Postamt Graz 1,
- für Tirol beim Postamt Innsbruck 1,
- für Vorarlberg beim Postamt Bregenz 1,
- für Wien beim Postamt Wien 15.

Am ersten Tag der Ausgabe, das ist am 5. September, werden Kleinbogen nur an Abonnenten abgegeben, und zwar erhält jeder Abonnent

gegen Vorweis des Behebungsscheines einen Satz Kleinbogen, ohne Rücksicht darauf, wie viele Sätze im Abonnement bestellt sind und bei welchem Amte sie behoben werden.

Der Bezug dieser Kleinbogensätze ist durch Abdruck eines von der Postzeugverwaltung mitgelieferten Stempels auf dem Behebungsschein vorzumerken.

Am ersten Tag unverkauft gebliebene Kleinbogensätze sind am zweiten zu verkaufen, am Schluß der Verkaufszeit unverkauft gebliebene der Postzeugverwaltung zurückzusenden.

Die einzelnen Marken eines Kleinbogens können in der Zeit vom 5. bis 30. September 1946 zur Freimachung verwendet werden; der Zuschlag bleibt hiebei außer Betracht.

Ein Umtausch der Kleinbogen findet nicht statt.

(B. M. Zl. 25.370 vom 19. September 1946.)

The PuTVBlatt announcing that the Renner Sheets had already been issued (hence it was too late to buy them!)



The 1S + 1S value of the Renner Sheets.

Why (and how) were these sheets issued?

The on-sale period was only two days (5 & 6 September) and no official advance notice was given. They were only available at 10 post offices, and were only postally valid for 3 weeks. They were sold only in complete sets of four sheets-of-eight, which cost you 176 Sch – and the average monthly salary of a Beamte was 150 Sch.

I am unaware of any official explanation, although I am equally unaware of any searches in the State Archives. Various surmises have been put forward. Maybe they wanted to celebrate the Second Republic's first anniversary with something special? Perhaps it was to please - or niggle - the occupying powers? Maybe they saw it as yet another way of earning desperately-needed foreign currency? The last is probably the most likely!

Although there were long queues in Postgasse, more than half of the 20,000 printed were disposed of through Other Channels. It is alleged that 12,000 were “reserved for the American occupying troops”. Quite a number of airmail covers are known, franked with strange divisions of the sheet (eg horizontal pair with all the margins, vertical strip including the label and so on) and sent to America – thus becoming “genuinely used” and resellable at a profit!

Was there a Blackprint?

Briefly: no. A few 'colour trials' exist but none are in black. The author thought he had discovered a set of blackprints, but they are almost certainly cut-outs, possibly from an old Lindner album.



Where did they get the paper?

In 1946 there were great shortages of everything; the Postal Authorities found enough to print stamps on but not to issue their instructions to each Post Office. So how did they find expensive 'Japan' paper? In about 1943, the Staatsdruckerei in Vienna printed the stamps for the Generalgouvernement, ie German-occupied Poland. One of those special series for Poland was printed on that yellow Japan paper, and that there was left-over paper from that printing in the Staatsdruckerei in 1946. Since they already had it, as kindly supplied by the Germans, it was available for a limited printing of the Renner sheets.



Above: this card, issued between 1920 and 1934, shows the junction of today's Burgring (foreground, with trams) and Dr-Karl-Renner-Ring running past Parliament.