Part III: War [in] Comics

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The Forgotten World of Vienna's Interwar Comic Strips

Introduction

Austria between the two World Wars was marked by instability. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918, the tiny rump republic lurched from one political or economic crisis to the next for two decades, transforming in 1934 from a shaky parliamentary democracy into a no less fragile authoritarian state—which was itself absorbed into the neighbouring German National Socialist dictatorship five years later.

Deprived of its former provinces, Austria was dominated by the city of Vienna, home to almost a third of the shrunken nation's population. While most of the country was devoutly Catholic and politically conservative, "Red Vienna" was the stronghold of the Social Democratic Party, advocate of the trades and industrial workers, led largely by educated, middle-class moderates. The fact that many Social Democrat leaders were of Jewish background hardly endeared the party to the conservatives and nationalists, who had undercut support for liberal and socialist movements at the end of the nineteenth century by emphasizing a deeply anti-Semitic populism (Judson 223-65). Nonetheless, for the first decade and a half after the Great War the Social Democrats controlled Vienna's city council, setting the policy and budget affecting a huge number of Austrians; at the same time, despite continual electoral gains at the federal level, the party was shut out of national government by rotating coalitions of the conservative Christian Social Party and various further-right parties (Barnett and Woywode 1463-4). Even with a common enemy, these coalitions were so volatile that between 1918 and 1934, twelve chancellors presided over twenty-two different cabinets.

The republic's constant upheavals were reflected in a lively press landscape: prior to 1934 every political party had its own daily or weekly newspaper—if not several, appealing to different segments of the population (Paupié 83-116). This spectrum included satirical and humorous papers such as the originally liberal but later right-wing *Kikeriki* ("Cock-a-Doodle-Doo," founded 1861), the conservative *Die Muskete* ("The Musket," founded 1905) and the left-wing *Die Leuchtrakete* ("The Flare," founded 1923). There were also *unparteiisch* or unaffiliated newspapers, including those re-

flecting liberal viewpoints (since liberalism as a party-political movement was moribund), as well as fully apolitical papers (Paupié 42); and periodicals aimed at specific trades or professions. By 1918 all these genres, and indeed some individual newspapers, already had decades of history. Satirical newspapers in Vienna, for instance, stretched back at least to Moritz Gottlob Saphir's *Humorist*, founded in 1837 (Haas 4)—although prior to the partial abolition of censorship following the revolutions of 1848 they had seldom used drawn caricatures, which were both less ambiguous and more accessible to the barely literate than prose (Haas 5). By the 1870s, political cartoons had become common (Haas 6-8); when the First World War began, they could be found not only in dedicated satire periodicals but also on the editorial pages of conventional newspapers. It was in the pages of the postwar satirical press, however, that isolated single-panel cartoons developed into comic strips, spreading from there into other types of newspapers.

The following is a description of comic strips with continuing characters published in the Viennese press between 1919 and 1942. These strips, a handful of which were both popular and long-lived, appeared in newspapers across the political spectrum during the 1920s. As political developments increasingly narrowed that spectrum following the inception of authoritarian government in 1933; the brief Civil War and establishment of dictatorship in February 1934; and finally, the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany and dissolution of Austria in March 1938, new strips continued to debut in the dwindling number of newspapers. No comic strip created after the Civil War, however, managed to achieve longevity; and indeed, the majority of these strips lasted only a few episodes. In general, those strips that lasted longest accommodated themselves—often perforce—to changes in the political landscape; just as importantly, they also addressed their readers not only in political terms, but rather also as consumers of the very newspapers they were reading.

The Press and Consumer Culture in Interwar Vienna

Histories of comics art long declared that, notwithstanding evidence of European antecedents, the origins of the modern comic strip lay in the US, specifically in the form of Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* in William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* from 1895 on. In terms of

both form and content, this argument maintained, comic strips were thus "uniquely American" (Gordon 5-6). As Ian Gordon points out, however:

> Comic strips in the United States were the product of a specific set of social relations that ripened in American cities in the 1890s. In a particular time and place comic strips developed a specific form. *But it was a form that leaned heavily on the past and that could be transported to, or invented in, other cultures with slight variation as they too achieved modernity*. (8; emphasis added)

In addition to its long history of satirical newspapers and caricatures, postwar Austria had also come to accept the general consumerism and commodification Gordon describes as a main impetus for American comic strips; to such an extent that historian Anton Holzer writes:

> "The republic converted the street into a vertically opened newspaper. …." In this brief, laconic observation, the Austrian writer Alfred Polgar sums up the transformation of public space in the 1920s. The "vertically opened newspaper" refers to the script of political and commercial promotion—advertisements, posters, neon signs and the like.[1] (Holzer)

Notably, in the magazine *Moderne Welt* ("Modern World") in February 1928, the nationalist *Feuilletonist* Alexander Schilling expressly described this effect on the Viennese cityscape as "a symptom of ongoing Americanization" (*ein Symptom fortschreitender Amerikanisierung*; Schilling 24). As Polgar's metaphor of the "vertically opened newspaper" indicates, however, these changes had already occurred in the pages of Vienna's newspapers, where an increasing number of advertisements vied for space with political and social commentary of all kinds—and with pioneering comic strips.

According to statistics compiled by Gabriele Melischek and Josef Seethaler, the number of Viennese daily newspapers between 1919 and 1945 peaked just before the end of the republic in 1934, sank in the four years of the authoritarian *Bundesstaat* or federal state—with a brief plateau in the middle—and fell deeper yet following the 1938 *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany, until a rapid final decline in 1942 (see Fig. 1). Weekly papers presumably followed a similar pattern, given that most of them were produced by the same publishers; the Austrian weekly press, however,

1 "'Die Republik hat die Straße zur vertikal ausgespannten Zeitung gewandelt. ….' In dieser knappen, lakonischen Beobachtung fasst der österreichische Schriftsteller Alfred Polgar in den 1920er Jahren die Veränderung des öffentlichen Raumes zusammen. Mit der 'vertikal ausgespannten Zeitung' ist die Schrift der politischen und kommerziellen Reklame gemeint—Anzeigen, Plakate, Lichtschriften und ähnliches."

remains under-researched, particularly during the Nazi era (Seethaler and Melischek 11).

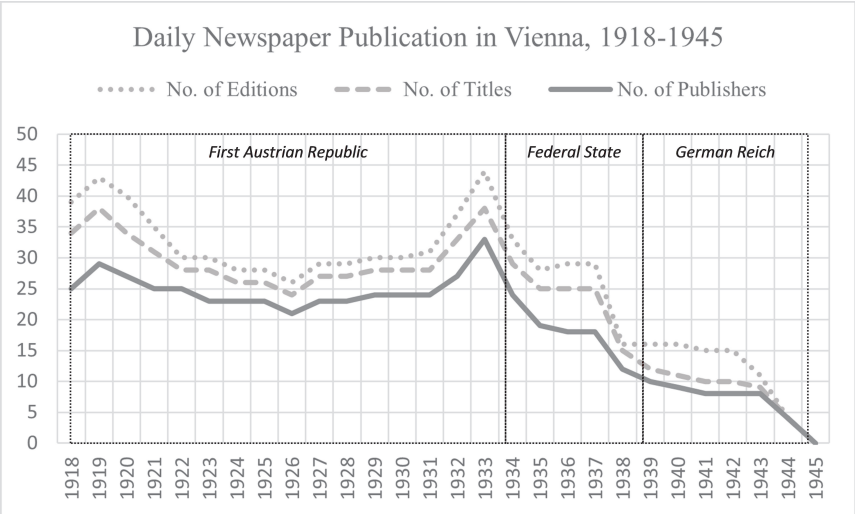

Fig. 1: Based on Melischek and Seethaler 1992.

Between 1923 and 1942, Viennese newspapers across the political spectrum published at least twenty locally produced comic strips with continuing characters, many of them American-style strips with speech balloons; some were short-lived, containing only three or four episodes, while a handful, such as Ludwig (*né* Ladislaus) Kmoch's *Tobias Seicherl*, lasted a decade or more. There were also many gag comic strips without recurring characters, particularly in the 1930s. Although a few foreign comic strips were licensed from abroad—most notably George E. Studdy's charming British strip *Bonzo the Dog*, which ran in the *Illustrierte Wochenpost* ("Illustrated Weekly Post," or *Illwo*) for three months at the end of 1929; Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff*, which appeared in the same paper for the first three months of 1930; and Walt Disney's *Donald Duck*, which was printed in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* ("Viennese Latest News") under the title *Duck, die Ente* ("Duck, the Duck") from 2 Dec. 1938 to 5 May 1939—these were relative latecomers, and far outnumbered by strips written and drawn by Austrians. Unfortunately, the editorial records of Viennese papers prior to 1945 have all been lost (Früh 37); as a result, the biographies of newspaper artists during this period are difficult to reconstruct, and some artists can-

not even be identified. Moreover, the writers of comic strips were almost always uncredited.

The First Austrian Republic: Heyday of the Comic Strips

Between 1919 and mid-1933, as Melischek and Seethaler's statistics show, the Viennese newspaper landscape was at its broadest and most diverse. It is during this period that comic strips first appeared, and that the long-lived strips had the opportunity to establish themselves; by the end of this period, however, the imposition of strict censorship began a trend of attrition among newspapers that was never to be reversed.

The first proto-comic strip was published in the satirical paper *Der Götz von Berlichingen*. *Der Götz* had first appeared on 10 April 1919, taking its name and attitude from the irreverent knightly protagonist of Goethe's 1773 drama. The colourful tabloid spent seven months excoriating both the Austrian politicians who failed to achieve *Anschluss* with the nascent German Republic and the victorious Allies who prevented it, before ceasing publication in September. In its final issue of 27 September 1919, however, the paper linked together all the cartoons in its eight pages into a narrative about the coal shortage in Vienna. The captions and additional text portrayed desperate Viennese (p. 1; see Fig. 2) driven to seek warmer climes, such as the equatorial regions (p. 3), or to hang themselves (p. 4), only to find that coal was lacking in both heaven (p. 5) and hell (p. 6). Returning to Vienna, barring digging into neighbours' hidden stocks of coal (p. 7), the only recourse was to resign oneself, because "Vienna remains Vienna" (*Wien bleibt Wien*; p. 8). The cartoons were provided by Franz Kraft (pp. 1 and 8), Carl Josef (pp. 3 and 4), Josef Danilowatz (pp. 5 and 6), Franz Dobias and Paul Humpoletz (both p. 7).

This *tour de force* was unfortunately the paper's swan song, at least for the time being. *Der Götz* returned in a cheaper, black-and-white form in October 1923, however, with a new publisher, Maximilian Schreier, and editor, the controversial novelist Hugo Bettauer. Though the paper was left-liberal in its leanings, the revived *Götz*—subtitled "a humorous polemic against everybody" (*eine lustige Streitschrift gegen alle*)—mocked conservatives, socialists, bourgeois, anti-Semites and, with increasing frequency, Nazis for the next eleven years, using satirical prose, poetry, exquisite single-panel cartoons—and genuine comic strips.

Fig. 2: "The Final Economizing Measure," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 27 Sept. 1919, p. 1, drawn by Franz Kraft. The landlord locks out his tenants to save coal. The coal shortage is so dire that the artist supposedly lacked charcoal to finish the upper left corner of the picture. [2]

Foremost and longest-lived among the revived *Götz*'s comic strips was the feature *Bilderbogen des kleinen Lebens* (roughly, "Scenes from Everyday Life"), which first appeared in the fourth issue ("Frau Riebeisel Buys A Dog," 2 Nov. 1923, 4). The strip was drawn by Fritz Gareis, Jr., a trained painter who already during the war had moved into magazines and newspapers, producing cartoons for Schreier's other paper, *Der Morgen*, and other publications on the political left, as well as children's books. Possibly the first ongoing speech-balloon comic strip in German, the *Bilderbogen* was unlike any of Gareis's previous work; Eckart Sackmann and Harald Havas suggest that George McManus's 1904 American comic strip *The Newlyweds*, which also appeared in Europe, may have been a model (52). Like *The Newlyweds*, *Bilderbogen* had an elegant young couple as its protagonists—unlike their cloyingly affectionate American counterparts, however, Herr and Frau Riebeisel (a dialect word for a grater, such as a cheese grater) both have difficulty staying faithful, and divorce is constantly threatened from the very first episode. The strip's scripts were written by Bettauer (Krug 99-100), who had worked as a journalist in New York between 1904 and 1910, and who may thus have been directly acquainted with the McManus strip. The addition of twins to the family only three months later, after a week's pregnancy, only added to the family's instability, again in contrast to the idyllic family life of McManus's American pair, whose Baby Snookums further cemented his parents' happiness. The Riebeisel children, Hansl and Gretl, grew to school age in eight months, and then no further for the strip's remaining decade. Herr Riebeisel, a monocled dandy, is a bank director, but continually broke thanks to Frau Riebeisel's extravagant spending and his own fecklessness; no family outing is complete until his wallet and watch have been stolen. Equally incompetent at his job, home repair, and philandering, Riebeisel's pretensions to respectability are punctured as he is repeatedly taken for a Jew in one of the strip's running gags—whether rightly or wrongly is never clarified, though all his colleagues from the bank have Jewish names. By means of this gag, Hugo Bettauer, himself a convert from Judaism to Lutheranism, carried on the fierce criticism of anti-Semitism that he had expressed in his controversial 1922 satirical novel *Die Stadt ohne Juden* ("The City Without Jews"; see Fig.3).

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2 See here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb&datum=19190927&seite=1&zoom=33 (ANNO/Öster-reichische Nationalbibliothek)

Fig. 3: "Scenes from Everyday Life: Riebeisels at the Football Match," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 16 Apr. 1924, p. 4, drawn by Fritz Gareis. [3]

Thanks to the hapless Riebeisels' comic attempts to maintain their middle-class status despite Austria's economic difficulties and their own impracticality, the *Bilderbogen* quickly became a popular feature in *Der Götz von Berlichingen*; not only did the paper itself frequently depict the Riebeisels as its "stars," even within the strip itself, but they also appeared in adver-

tising, such as a 1924 poster for Aristophon radio sets, signed by Gareis (Sackmann and Havas 55). An August 1924 editorial in the *Götz* averred that the Riebeisels "are worthy to rank with the great figures of contemporary literature, [Thomas Mann's] *Buddenbrooks*, [Leo Tolstoy's] *Anna Karenina*, [Gerhart Hauptmann's] *Rose Bernd*, [Oswald Spengler's] *Decline of the West*, etc."[4] ("Riebeisels Go Sledding," 1 Aug. 1924, 7).

It must have come as a double shock when both of the strip's creators died suddenly: Hugo Bettauer died on 26 March 1925.[5] The writing of the *Bilderbogen* was presumably taken over by the satirist and lyricist Theodor Waldau, who had already relieved Bettauer as editor of the *Götz* in March 1924. Then, however, Fritz Gareis died of influenza on 5 October 1925; he was two weeks short of his fifty-third birthday, and his last Riebeisel strip had appeared only a week and a half before his death. For two months, the *Götz* did without the Riebeisels—then, on 27 November 1925, they are welcomed back by the tabloid's namesake and mascot, Götz von Berlichingen himself ("Riebeisels Are Back Again!," 27 Nov. 1925, 3). The Riebeisels' adventures were now drawn by Karl Theodor Zelger, a trained painter like Gareis, who continued the strip for a further eight years and three hundred episodes. Zelger's version continued not only Gareis's original thematic concerns and characterizations, but also the strip's commercialization: in a series of strips appearing for six weeks in January and February 1928, Herr Riebeisel is driven mad by the family's decrepit icebox until he purchases a Frigidaire refrigerator.[6]

The Riebeisels remained a fixture of *Der Götz von Berlichingen* until 30 March 1934, only twelve weeks before the paper ceased publication. The

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3 A digitized copy is available at: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb&datum=19240516&seite=4& zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek). Jr. Herr Riebeisel is surprised to be labelled a "Jewish ass" when he roots for Vienna's Jewish football club, Hakoah; the woman who insults him, a supporter of the working-class club Rapid (as is Frau Riebeisel), later calls another Hakoah fan "meschugge." The resulting brawl is interrupted in the final panel when a ball from Hakoah player Egon Pollak strikes Riebeisel's head.

4 "Herr Riebeisel, Frau Riebeisel und zwei kleine Riebeisels … reihen sich würdig den großen Gestalten der zeitgenössischen Literatur, den Buddenbrooks, der Anna Karenina, der Rose Bernd, dem Untergang des Abendlandes usw. an."

5 Bettauer had been shot on 10 March by Nazi supporter Otto Rothstock, and died in hospital two weeks later.

6 These advertisements, which ran on a different page of each issue from the regular strip, were the strip's only episodes credited to a writer: lyricist and film scenarist Franz Josef "Joe" Gribitz (see, for example, "Herr Riebeisel repariert den Eiskasten," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 20 Jan. 1928, 11).

final strip is both an apt metaphor for contemporary politics and a fitting epitaph for its characters: Herr Riebeisel destroys a carpet trying to remove a grease stain and sets up a shrine to Goethe to conceal the damage (see Fig.4).

Fig. 4: "Scenes from Everyday Life: Herr Riebeisel and the Stain," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 30 Mar. 1934, p. 4, drawn by Karl Theodor Zelger. [7]

7 Herr Riebeisel spills sardines on the carpet, and all attempts to clean the stain only make matters worse; the resulting hole is finally hidden by erecting a shrine to the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. A digital copy is available at: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb&datum=19340330&seite=4&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

In the brief interregnum when the Riebeisels were missing from the *Götz*, Peter Eng (*né* Engelmann) began publishing *Turl und Schurl*, or "Artie and Georgie," which continued for forty-four episodes over almost two years, from October 1925 to July 1927. Where the Riebeisels' middle-class pretensions were signalled by their speaking standard German, Turl and Schurl were working-class and spoke thick Viennese dialect in speech balloons. Drawn in a grotesque, lively style that showed Eng's background as an animator, the pair were of indeterminate age, but constantly on the lookout for women, drink and opportunities to make easy money, few of which were successful; if a third party did not foil their plans, they frequently sabotaged each other (Havas 30-33). What they excelled at, however, was mocking and skewering intellectuals and authority figures in a carnival upheaval of class dynamics, as for example when they present a forensic scientist with a mysterious bone that he interprets as proof of a violent suicide—but which they ultimately reveal to be a bone from their lunch (see Fig. 5).

Only eleven days before his first Riebeisel strip, Karl Theodor Zelger had published the first episode of *Wamperl und Stamperl* in the left-liberal weekly tabloid *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*. This full-page strip's protagonist was the portly *bourgeois* landlord Alois Wamperl, who is continually led into trouble, to his wife Amalie's exasperation, by his tall, skinny friend Seppl Stamperl; both men began the strip as husbands, but Stamperl's wife soon disappeared, and he became a rambunctious *divorcé*. The landlord class had historically been a major supporter of conservative and nationalist movements (Boyer 390-403), and Wamperl could have become a biting satire of that group; but the strip was rarely political. Nonetheless, Wamperl ran unsuccessfully for the "Interconfusional Nazi-Imperial-and-Royal-Republican Black-Red-Blue Haze Party" in the Republic's final parliamentary elections of November 1930, promising lower beer prices and "the free exchange of wives" (see Fig. 6); incensed by the price of alcohol, he threatened a coup against the government a year later, but drank himself unconscious before carrying it out ("Wamperl's Putsch," 21 Sept. 1931, 16); and he ran for mayor in Vienna's municipal and provincial election of spring 1932 as leader of the "Anti-Party," which was simply "against everything," garnering a mere six votes ("Wamperl Founds a New Party," 18 April 1932, 16).

Fig. 5: "Turl, Schurl and Forensic Medicine," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 12 Nov. 1935, p. 5, drawn by Peter Eng. [8]

Such political sallies ended when the Dollfuss government instituted a rigorous censorship regime in March 1933; but they had never been a crucial part of the strip. For the most part, free of the financial pressures that in the Riebeisels' strip fuelled real social criticism, Wamperl and Stamperl pursue fad diets, build crackpot inventions, wrestle with recalcitrant home appliances and uncooperative pets—and fail at various side hustles (including a brief stint as sports reporters for *Der Montag*) and repeated drunken attempts at infidelity. Although they occasionally travel abroad for more extended adventures, most of their activities revolve around Wamperl's apartment and building. On *Der Montag*'s larger pages, and no longer having to maintain continuity with Fritz Gareis's Riebeisel characters, Zelger was able to use a more spacious, airy style; the comparison is even clearer because for the next nine years, Zelger was drawing both strips. The scripts for many of the episodes between April 1927 and September 1928 are explicitly credited to Joe Gribitz, with a handful from August to November 1928 ascribed to "Salpeter" (Karl Pollach), who like Gribitz was a popular musical lyricist. The authorship of the remaining strips, despite a general continuity of style, is unknown.

The Social Democratic Party, meanwhile, saw itself as the voice of the working class; but its main official press organ, the heavily theoretical *Arbeiter-Zeitung* or "Workers' Newspaper," was no easy read. To increase its reach, the party began publishing *Das Kleine Blatt* ("The Little Paper"), a family-friendly daily newspaper, on 1 March 1927. The first issue featured *Bobby Bärs Abenteuer* ("Bobby Bear's Adventures"), which appeared Sundays—and for a brief period in 1930, daily—for the next fourteen and a half years, making it by far the longest-lived strip of the period (see Fig. 7). Aimed at young readers, *Bobby Bär* was a captioned strip, with rhyming dialogue under pictures drawn in an elegant illustrative style by Franz Plachy. Despite the realistic drawings, anthropomorphic animals and human characters mingled freely. Although the texts were probably written by several hands, at least some of the scripts were by Josefine Fischer (Pfolz 7). Initially, the strip educated the eponymous protagonist

8 Turl and Schurl bring in a bone given them by "a man in a black jacket." The doctor interprets it as "the cheekbone of a 23-year-old suicide" with traces of "violent extraction with a fork-like instrument" and signs of "progressive arteriosclerosis." When he condescendingly asks what they think it is, they reply that it was listed on the menu as "short ribs with beets." A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb& datum=19251112&seite=5&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

Fig. 6: "Wamperl's Election Programme," *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag* 13 Oct. 1930, p. 16, drawn by Karl Theodor Zelger. [9]

and his schoolmates, Hansi Has' (Hansi Hare) and Mitzi Maus (Mitzi Mouse), about the achievements of Vienna's Social Democrats in municipal government, from housing projects, vacation camps and children's hospitals to garbage collection, as well as confronting social issues such as inequality, alcoholism, child abuse and cruelty to animals.

Fig. 7: "Bobby Bär: In the Animal Museum," *Das Kleine Blatt* 25 Nov. 1930, p. 12, drawn by Franz Plachy. [10]

Bobby Bär quickly became enormously popular, constituting a major form of outreach to young working-class readers (Pfolz 8). Communication with the strip's readership took place through letters to the editor and the editor's responses, write-in contests, surveys and the creation in 1931 of a "Bobby-Bär-Bund," or Bobby Bär Association, which united regional clubs into a national organization for activities and charity work. This idea was likely borrowed from the British Labour newspaper *The Daily Herald*,

9 The *interkonfuse-nazistische-k.k.-republikanische schwarzrotblaue Dunstpartei* mocks the far-right wing of contemporary Austrian politics, particularly the *Nationaler Wirtschaftsblock und Landbund* or *Schoberblock*, a coalition of the Greater German People's Party (*Großdeutsche Volkspartei*) and the Rural Federation (*Landbund*) headed by former chancellor Johannes Schober. Unlike Wamperl, in real life both the *Schoberblock* and the even more reactionary Homeland Block (*Heimatblock*) won enough seats to enter parliament. A digital copy is available here. https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=mon&datum=19301013&seite=16&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

10 A rare use of speech balloons in what was generally a captioned strip; this episode, featuring Bobby, Mitzi Maus, Hansi Has' and a later addition, Ali Aff' (Ali Ape), is from a brief period when the strip appeared daily in addition to the larger Sunday strip, which featured much longer rhyming texts. The daily run was abandoned after two months due to complaints from readers whose families could only afford to take the paper's Sunday edition. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=dkb&datum=19301025&seite=12&zoom=33 (ANNO/ Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

which had published a *Bobby Bear* comic strip since 1919 and instituted its own "Bobby Bear Club" in 1930; however, the Austrian organization was more overtly political, serving as a gateway into long-established Social Democratic youth organizations (Pfolz 8; Potyka 197). *Das Kleine Blatt* attempted to foster a sense of democratic participation in *Bobby Bär* fans: at the beginning of 1930, in response to readers' comments, the strip's captions were changed from the blackletter *Fraktur* typeface to a Roman type, so that six- and seven-year-old readers who had not yet learned *Fraktur* in school could read the strip for themselves ("Dear Children!," *Das Kleine Blatt* 12 Jan. 1930, 15). Party-sponsored celebrations advertised in the paper regularly promised personal appearances by Bobby Bär and his friends—presumably costumed employees—and annual books collecting the year's comic strips were given away in the thousands to readers between 1929 and 1932 (Pfolz 8; Potyka 198).

Das Kleine Blatt was so clearly successful that in January 1929, a publisher allied with the conservative Christian Social Party founded its own rival family newspaper, *Das kleine Volksblatt* ("The Little People's Paper"), with their answer to *Bobby Bär*: *Bumsternazi*.[11] The protagonist was a wooden Christmas ornament—a programmatic choice—come to rambunctious life, drawn by painter Theo Henning under the pseudonym "Onkel Theo." *Bumsternazi* is, like *Bobby Bär*, a caption comic with separate pictures and rhyming text; but where the Social Democratic hero is generally well-behaved, the Pinocchio-like Bumsternazi is a prankster who regularly earns corporal punishment for his escapades. Bumsternazi could on occasion prove himself as good-hearted and inventive as Bobby, however, and they also both had bursts of globetrotting adventure. Likewise, if Bobby Bär and friends turned up at Social Democratic party functions, Christian Social children could count on an appearance from Bumsternazi—"in person" or in the form of a narrated magic lantern show—at their fêtes. However, no clubs or associations were formed in Bumsternazi's name, and he was favoured with only a single early collection of his first year's strips (Henning 1934), with no further volumes, which may indicate that he never achieved the popularity of his ursine competitor.

11 At the time, this was an innocent name, the Austrian equivalent of saying to a toddler "fall-down-go-boom." *Nazi* was also a nickname for *Ignaz*, a popular name in Catholic Austria. Note that while *Das Kleine Blatt* (and its later stablemate, *Das Kleine Frauenblatt*) consistently capitalized the *k* in *Kleine* in its title, *Das kleine Volksblatt* did not.

The commercial publishers in particular were always eager to lure readers from one of their papers to another, and in 1930, Maximilian Schreier promoted his two newspapers by means of a contest: from mid-June to mid-August both *Der Morgen* ("The Morning," which appeared Mondays) and *Der Götz von Berlichingen* (which came out Fridays) published alternating chapters of an ongoing comic strip titled *Die Jagd nach dem Bild* ("The Hunt for the Picture"). The strip, drawn by Franz Kraft and plotted by the author Theodor Brun, had no captions or dialogue; the contest was to provide them, for a prize of 500 *Schilling*, divided among the best 27 entries; the top prize was 120 *Schilling* ("The Mute Newspaper Novel," *Der Morgen* 26 May 1930, 9), at a time when one *Schilling* bought about 2 kg of beef. Composing an entry required reading both papers for two months; however, because of the mailing time after the final chapter appeared, the evaluation period and the republication of the strip in larger instalments in *Der Götz von Berlichingen* alone, the promotion lasted six months, until mid-January 1931. The winner was a Dr. Grete Moldauer, whose rhyming couplets were a match for the professionals' (see Fig. 8); the consolation prize for entrants who failed to win a share of the prize money was a year's subscription to *Der Götz*.

In the meantime, October 1930 saw the arrival of the final comic strip of the interwar period to be granted a long life: Ludwig Kmoch's *Tobias Seicherl* in *Das Kleine Blatt*. Unlike *Bobby Bär*, this daily strip was aimed at adults: *Seicherl*, whose surname was slang for someone with no firm convictions, viciously lampooned the reactionary *petite-bourgeoisie* via its protagonist, whose belligerence was matched only by his stupidity—as pointed out regularly by his talking dog Struppi. Through *Tobias Seicherl*, Kmoch mocked not only the local conservative and nationalist right wing, but also Adolf Hitler's German National Socialists, in strips that seem uncomfortably prophetic in hindsight. Nonetheless, Kmoch, a veteran of the left-wing and liberal press, made the bigoted and big-nosed Seicherl instantly recognizable and even lovable as a Viennese stereotype, complete with thick dialect, and he quickly became the paper's trademark (Havas and Sackmann 50-3). Common among almost all the comic strips of the period is the characters' self-awareness: they know that they are appearing in newspapers, and other characters often recognize them as celebrities from comic strips; within his own strip, Seicherl often advertised his upcoming appearances in special holiday issues of *Das Kleine Blatt*, and once even complains to Struppi that because the previous day's episode had shown him appearing with Hitler, "When people read that, they'll

Fig. 8: "The Hunt for the Picture," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 7 Nov. 1930, p. 4. [12]

lose all appetite for the Third Reich!" (*Wenn die Leut' des les'n, verlier'n s' den ganzen Appetit auf's dritte Reich!*; "Seicherl Fears Hitler's Vengeance," *Das Kleine Blatt* 15 Apr. 1932, 13). At one point, Seicherl even appears in Bobby Bär's strip, drawn by Franz Plachy ("Bobby and Seicherl Get Together," *Das Kleine Blatt* 9 Aug. 1931, 17); and later a magically rejuvenated Seicherl attempts to join the Bobby-Bär-Bund (see Fig. 9).

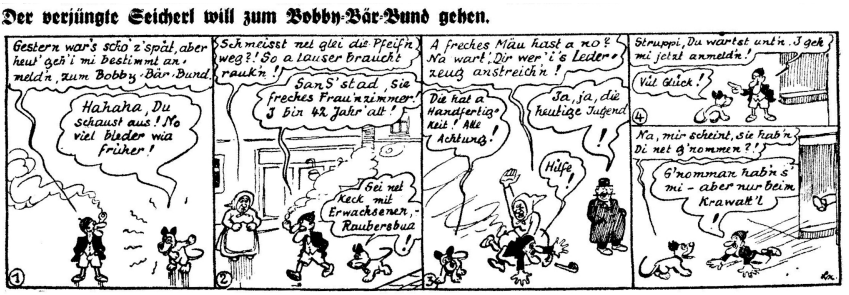

Fig. 9: "Tobias Seicherl: The Rejuvenated Seicherl Wants to Join the Bobby-Bär-Bund," *Das Kleine Blatt* 22 Mar. 1932, p. 13, drawn by Ludwig Kmoch. [13]

Also in October 1930, *Das Kleine Blatt* began publishing the daily adventures of *Klipp und Klapp*, two young brothers with a penchant for mischief that saw them stow away on a steamer bound from Vienna to New York for adventures in America. The geographical impossibility of the trip segues into a fantasy new world consisting of skyscrapers and escalators immediately bordering on frontier wilderness and Hollywood film studios. The artist, Wilhelm "Bil" Spira, was only sixteen years old, and the strip seemed to be aimed at his peers: rather than speech balloons, *Klipp*

12 The first installment of the contest strip, drawn by Franz Kraft, with the winning captions by reader Dr. Grete Moldauer, republished "according to the many wishes of our readers." The full story consisted of 210 panels in ten weekly chapters. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb&datum= 19301107&seite=4&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

13 In a typically absurd situation, the usually moustachioed Seicherl has been surgically reduced to childhood, earning a spanking for smoking his pipe. His strips often end with him bodily ejected from some establishment; to Struppi's question, "Well, it seems they didn't take you?" he replies, "Yes, they did—but only by the necktie." Kmoch became expert at sketching his tiny figures recognizably, leaving plenty of room for speech balloons. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=dkb&datum=19320322&seite=13&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

und Klapp used rhyming captions, and it had no real political content. Klipp and Klapp flew back home to Vienna after a whirlwind seven weeks to a hero's welcome on 27 Nov. 1930—which, given that they had left town on the run from the police, was as unlikely as the rest of the tale, but provided a happy ending (see Fig. 10).

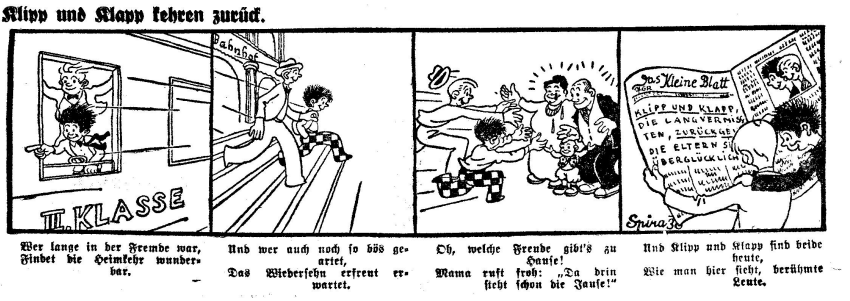

Fig. 10: "Klipp and Klapp Return" from their adventures in America, *Das Kleine Blatt* 27 Nov. 1939, p. 11, drawn by Bil Spira. [14]

By the spring of 1931, Karl Theodor Zelger was drawing the *Bilderbogen des kleinen Lebens* only bi-weekly for *Der Götz*, while *Wamperl und Stamperl* continued weekly in *Der Montag*; Zelger was one of the period's busiest artists, regularly producing comics pages for the Steinsberg Verlag, whose comics were sold to department and chain stores as customer giveaways to keep children occupied (Lukasch 175-6; Dostal 71-2). With only eight to ten pages per issue, *Der Götz* had little room for additional comic strips, but in September and October of 1931 the tabloid published four instalments of a strip called *Die Abenteuer des Meisterdetektivs Tom Schnapps* ("The Adventures of the Master Detective Tom Schnapps"), drawn by Fritz Krommer. Two of these episodes appeared in issues of the paper where there was no Riebeisel strip.

With his tweed flat cap, plus fours and pipe, Tom Schnapps parodies the detectives in popular fiction; in particular, there had been a series of German silent films about "Tom Shark" in 1916-17, and in 1928 the name

14 Of course, their exploits are recounted in *Das Kleine Blatt* itself; the characters of Viennese comic strips were frequently aware of their status as "stars" of their respective papers. *Klipp und Klapp,* unusually for the period, seems to have been short-lived by design. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno? aid=dkb&datum=19301127&seite=11&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

had recently reappeared as "The King of Detectives" (*Der König der Detektive*) in a popular dime novel series. Tom Schnapps, however, is no king of detectives; in his first four-panel "adventure," he hears a cry for help from a cellar and sneaks in, pistol drawn, only to be asked by a housewife to carry a heavy sack up to the fourth floor ("The Cry From the Cellar," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 4 Sept. 1931, 5). Subsequent episodes showed him to be not only unlucky, but incompetent: he mistakes wine for blood and a sleeping drunk for a corpse; thinks illicit sex in Vienna's famous Prater amusement park is a murder (see Fig. 11); and finally apprehends an adulterer's mistress, only to be caught with her by his own wife.

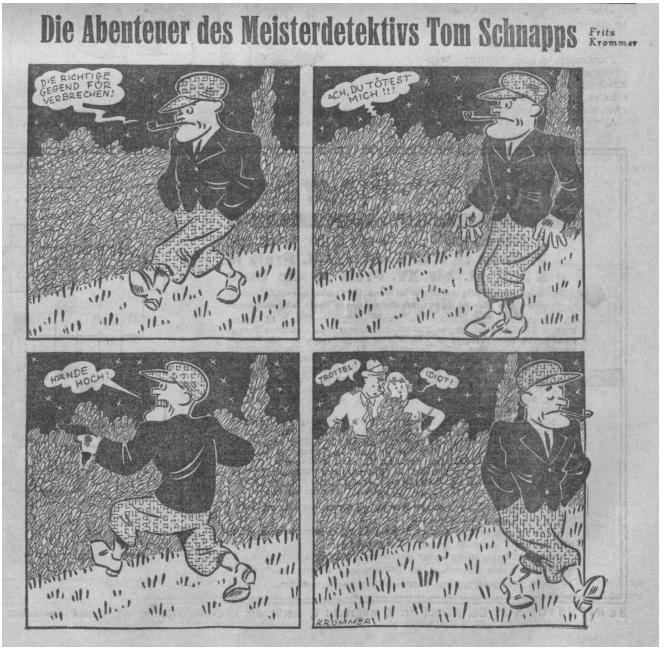

Fig. 11: "The Adventures of the Master Detective Tom Schnapps," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 18 Sept. 1931, p. 5. [15]

15 The third and penultimate episode, drawn by Fritz Krommer. Vienna's Prater park was a popular venue for lovers' trysts, but Schnapps sees it only as "The right place for crimes!" As a result, he misinterprets the cry, "Oh, you're killing me!" Schnapps's walking out of the fourth panel may be funnier than the strip's text. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=gvb&datum=19310918&seite=5&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichi-sche Nationalbibliothek)

In comparison with the *Götz*'s previous strips, this is insubstantial stuff, lacking in social commentary and weak as parody; four panels are not enough to develop a suitable situation, and neither Krommer's art nor the texts are witty enough to compensate—every gag falls flat. Instead of giving *Tom Schnapps* a chance to fill out its premise, the strip ended; the Riebeisels remained the only comic stars in *Der Götz*. For the paper itself, however, the end was nearing.

Throughout the early 1930s, tensions between left and right in Austria continued to rise. Although the Social Democrats had won a plurality in the 1930 election, the Christian Socials built a governing coalition with the right-wing *Schoberblock* and *Heimatblock*. Variations of this coalition struggled under two chancellors before Engelbert Dollfuss was appointed to the position in May 1932; seeking to stave off both the Social Democrats to his left and the rising National Socialists to his right, Dollfuss used a parliamentary crisis in March 1933 to dissolve parliament and establish an authoritarian government with strict press censorship. Open conflict finally broke out in the four-day Austrian Civil War of February 1934, which ended with the defeat of the Social Democratic forces.

The Federal State

The Austrian Republic officially ended with the promulgation of a new constitution, inspired by Mussolini's Italy, in May 1934. Although the resulting government is frequently called the *Ständestaat* or "corporate state," after the guild-like corporations that were meant to replace political parties, trade unions and social organizations alike, in fact most of these corporations were never created, partly due to the assassination of Dollfuss on 25 July 1934 in a botched Nazi coup. Officially, the May constitution replaced the *Republik* with a *Bundesstaat* or "federal state," an innocuous term that camouflaged the regime's authoritarian nature. Both the Social Democrats and the National Socialists were outlawed, and the large number of Social Democratic newspapers, including the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Das Kleine Blatt*, were shut down, as were many satirical papers across the political spectrum. As Barnett and Woywode point out, the result was that the newspaper competition among the various ideological camps actually intensified; but the Social Democrats and Nazis were forced to publish underground, while the Dollfuss (and later Schuschnigg) regime co-opted apolitical, conservative and non-Nazi right-wing organs in order

to present itself "as both a constructive and moderating force vis-à-vis the left and a patriotic Austrian alternative to the German-Nazi militancy of the right" (1474-5).

After only a few weeks following the Civil War, however, it became clear that workers were not migrating to the more conservative papers; and so *Das Kleine Blatt*, among others, was resuscitated with new editorial staff "to help win over great numbers of the workers for the prevailing regime" (Paupié 59).[16] As a result, both *Tobias Seicherl* and *Bobby Bär* returned in apolitical form—although the previous year's censorship measures had already tamed both strips considerably. Kmoch's and Plachy's drawings remained elegant as ever, but now the strips focussed on domestic matters, foreign travel, or fantasy. *Seicherl* concentrated increasingly on travelling to exotic lands, where Kmoch could still gently mock local society by making everyone, even Black Africans, speak in Viennese dialect. Meanwhile, in *Das kleine Volksblatt*, which was already well aligned with the state's reactionary values, *Bumsternazi* could continue much as before. Some of the liberal papers apparently came to an arrangement with the regime: Maximilan Schreier ended *Der Götz von Berlichingen* in June 1934, but was permitted to continue *Der Morgen*, which published no comic strips, and whose editorial page now focussed on support for Dollfuss and criticism of German Nazism; *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*, published by Paul Kolisch, continued the now-harmless *Wamperl und Stamperl*, which was a popular enough feature that from mid-March to late June of 1935, a promotional contest offered prizes for readers who could find figurines of the pair hidden in various places throughout Vienna.

Only two newspapers seem to have attempted to establish new comic strips during the remainder of the *Bundesstaat*. The former Social Democratic women's weekly, *Die Unzufriedene* ("The Dissatisfied Woman"), had been founded in 1923 with a focus on women's social issues, such as the high incidence of sexual exploitation in domestic service and the corresponding frequency of suicide. Although less dry than the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, it had been far more polemical than the later *Kleines Blatt*, and despite the censorship measures of 1933 had maintained a critical stance. Even its serialized novels and sewing tips were presented in the light of the class struggle, and interspersed with reminders that readers should wear the Social Democratic Party badge. After being shut down, *Die Unzufriedene*

16 "Das Blatt sollte dazu beitragen, weite Arbeiterkreise für die herrschende Regierung zu gewinnen."

too was relaunched two weeks later as an organ of the state, by which time editor Paula Hons-Nowotny had been replaced by Fritz Robert Kirchner, who had likewise taken over *Das Kleine Blatt* (Potyka 29); the first new issue of 22 April 1934 announced a contest for a new title, and as of 1 July the paper became *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* ("The Little Women's Paper"). The title change consolidated the paper's transformation from an organ of socialist and feminist activist journalism into a conservative newspaper that idolized film stars and idealized women's traditional place in the home as wives and mothers; in fact, *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* now resembled a cheaper version of the well-established glossy magazine *Wiener Hausfrau* ("Viennese Housewife," 1909-39).

Already in May 1934—over a month before the title change—*Die Unzufriedene* began publishing a humour strip entitled *Die Gedanken des lieben Nächsten* ("The Thoughts of Your Fellow Man," 6 May 1934, 6), by an artist who signed only as "Niessl." The strip's conceit, which substituted for continuing characters, combined speech balloons, in which people in everyday situations uttered what they were really thinking, with captions underneath the panels displaying the polite blather that they said out loud. Niessl's drawing style is grotesque and rather clumsy, and the jokes are generally predictable, but twelve episodes were published, though almost two months passed between the final two strips. It remains unclear why the new editorial staff might have thought *Die Gedanken* would appeal to the paper's readership any more than to a general audience, or how the strip fulfilled the paper's new mission of reconciling its readers with an increasingly repressive regime, other than by distracting them with apolitical entertainment.

In mid-March of 1935, *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* tried again, publishing fifteen instalments over the following six months of a strip by the painter Edmund Stierschneider. *Herr Knacker* was essentially a pantomime strip based on absurd sight gags; most of the episodes, however, were accompanied by rhyming couplets that added little to the humour but aided in deciphering the sometimes-awkward drawings. The gags themselves—involving unintended, usually harmful consequences of everyday actions, such as sawing through both a board and the table beneath it—are reminiscent of Oscar Jacobsson's Swedish strip *Adamson* (1920-1964), which had become hugely popular in the early 1920s, with episodes appearing in several Viennese newspapers. Even more than Adamson, Knacker was a grotesque: bow-legged, with a doglike, jowly snout but no chin, and a toothbrush moustache (see Fig. 12). Once again, however, the strip's

placement in a women's newspaper seemed inexplicable; most of Knacker's misadventures occur in the traditionally male preserve of handiwork or physical labour, and in not a single episode does a female character even appear.

Fig. 12: "Herr Knacker Plants a Sapling," *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* 1 Sept. 1935, p. 13, drawn by Edmund Stierschneider. [17]

The week after *Herr Knacker* ended, the paper began its longest experiment yet: over twenty-two weeks from 29 Sept. 1935 to 23 Feb. 1936, Otto Bittner's *Wendelin* appeared. This was the first strip that not only seemed to consider its readership, but also addressed it directly; in an introductory paragraph, the protagonist presented himself as a man who wanted to prove that he could keep house without a woman, and had adopted a son, Peperl, to raise according to the same principle. The female audience was clearly supposed to find this attempt amusing, since at the introduction's end, Wendelin asks his readers not to judge him too harshly: "For after all, I am only—a man" (*Denn schließlich bin ich ja doch nur—ein Mann*; *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* 29 Sept. 1935, 13).

Of course, Wendelin proves to be utterly incompetent at the simplest household task, from cooking to mending to shopping. The strip's charm comes from Bittner's loose, cartoony style and from the interaction be-

17 Knacker is as odd-looking in profile as he is full-on; in most of his misadventures he seems to be faced with a perverse world in which his actions backfire on him, but here he blithely plants his little tree upside down and is apparently satisfied with the result. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno? aid=uzf&datum=19350901&seite=13&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

tween Wendelin and Peperl, whose patience with his inept "uncle" seems to be grounded in genuine affection and understanding. There are also some unsettling undertones, however, when Wendelin buys a dozen lacy parasols at discount as a Christmas present for his twelve nieces and then returns home after being beaten, apparently for carrying such effeminate goods ("Wendelin Buys Inexpensive Christmas Presents," *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* 24 Dec. 1935, 8); and again when he goes to a costume party at Carnival time in drag, where he is kissed by a cowboy—and the crowd, realizing Wendelin is a man, joins forces to beat him (Fig. 13). In both cases he unconvincingly tells Peperl in the last panel that he has fallen down the stairs, connecting the two incidents and implying embarrassment or shame on Wendelin's part. Whether the joke is meant to be that Wendelin has been mistaken for a homosexual, or to hint that he desires to do without women because he is homosexual, these episodes stand out from the otherwise lighthearted proceedings. In any case, once *Wendelin* ended, *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* pursued no further comic strips.

Fig. 13: "Wendelin Goes to the Masquerade Ball," *Das Kleine Frauenblatt* 2 Feb. 1936, p. 13, drawn by Otto Bittner. [18]

18 Comic strip characters enjoyed the carnival and ball season in Vienna as much as real-life Viennese; Wendelin, however, is the only male character who goes to the costume ball in drag. Although a cowboy is tempted to kiss him, the crowd who beats him appears to be largely women. The adult comic strips of the period generally approached heterosexual activities—even mutual adultery—with a light touch, but the mere hint of a kiss between men results in immediate violent reprisal. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=uzf& datum=19360202&seite=13&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

In the spring of 1937, the weekly *Sport-Zeitung am Sonntag* ("Sports Paper on Sunday") featured an untitled comic strip in its first issue, depicting a local fan in a working-class peak cap painting himself brown to pass as an Italian player so that he can sneak into a football match (21 Mar. 1937, 14). By the next week, the paper had become *Sport-Zeitung für Sonntag* ("Sports Paper for Sunday") and the week after that, the fan returned, now with a name—Haxl—to continue his adventures for the following six months. By that time, the paper had long settled on its final name, *Fußball-Sonntag* ("Football Sunday"). Haxl, whose name in this context could be translated "Footsie" (and he indeed had massive feet to match his enlarged head), was drawn by the caricaturist Ferdinand Korber, who signed his work with "Kóra," from his Hungarian name, Nándor Kóra-Korber. Haxl's enthusiasm for football drove him to absurd lengths to get into matches beyond his meagre budget (see Fig. 14). Kóra combined hand-lettered captions in standard German with Haxl's speech balloons in thick Viennese dialect, demonstrating his proximity to the paper's reader; his adventures soon became repetitive, however, and after November he disappeared, although Kóra continued to draw gag cartoons for the paper until September 1939. After *Haxl*, no new local comic strips appeared in any major Viennese papers until shortly before the *Anschluss* in March 1938.

Then, suddenly, Paul Kolisch's liberal weekly *Illustrierte Wochenpost* began publishing short-lived local strips, with an emphasis on politically anodyne domestic situation comedies. Beginning on 7 January 1938, Karl Bannert's *Familie Waserl* lasted five episodes; Bannert's art was lively and became more elegant, but the strip's premise essentially combined elements of the Riebeisel family with a talking dog like Tobias Seicherl's. The strip's introduction said that *Familie Waserl* would appear "whenever the *Illwo* has room and the artist feels like it" (*Immer, wenn die "Illwo, Illustrierte Wochenpost" Platz und der Zeichner Lust haben wird*; *Illustrierte Wochenpost* 7 Jan. 1938, 20), which was hardly promising. Not only was the strip's continuation interrupted by reprinting three of Fritz Gareis's old Riebeisel strips of fourteen years earlier (altered to become the story of "Frau Blaserl," or "Mrs. Little Bubble"), but the final Waserl strip, concerning an exploding coffee maker (see Fig. 15), is virtually plagiarized

from one of Karl Theodor Zelger's last Riebeisel strips ("Riebeisels' Mocca Machine," *Der Götz von Berlichingen* 12 Jan. 1934, 4).[19]

Fig. 14: "Haxl as Scalper," *Sport-Zeitung für Sonntag* 2 May 1937, p. 11, drawn by "Kóra" (Ferdinand Korber). [20]

Waserl was immediately followed by three episodes of another domestic comedy, *Amandus Wichtig*, drawn by Zelger himself. The hapless newlywed Amandus Wichtig, despite his name, is neither loved (Latin *amandus*) nor important (German *wichtig*): his bride dominates him, his mother-in-law despises him, and even on his honeymoon he prefers to be in jail. By the third and final instalment he is happy to be hospitalized from a chill; since their tiny flat is too small for a double bed, Amandus has had to sleep on the floor ("Amandus Wichtig Moves Into His New Home," *Illustrierte Wochenpost* 25 Mar. 1938, 16). *Amandus Wichtig* last appeared two weeks after the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany of 12 Mar. 1938; Paul Kolisch, the Jewish publisher, and his editors had already been removed from both the *Illwo* and its stablemate *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*.[21] Both papers were "Aryanized"—cleansed of Jewish editors and contribu-

19 Karl Bannert also drew for several satire magazines, including *Mocca*, *Die Muskete*, and *Wiener Magazin*, and worked beside Zelger both for the Steinsberg children's magazines and the similar advertising giveaway magazine *Das Hammerbrot-Schlaraffenland*, produced by the Hammerbrot bread company (Hall 47).

20 A series of ridiculous disguises fails to gain tickets to a match against Scotland that Haxl can resell, and by the final panel he will have to buy his own tickets from another scalper. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=fus&datum=19370502&seite=11&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

21 Kolisch was sent to the concentration camp at Dachau on 2 April 1938, and eventually on to the Buchenwald camp, where he was killed on 15 Dec. 1939.

tors—and continued with new staff who would follow the directives of the Nazi Party (Paupié 74). Both at the *Illwo* and elsewhere, however, artists and cartoonists who were not Jewish usually kept their positions even when they had long careers prior to 1934 working in liberal, Social Democratic or even Communist newspapers; but the price would be collaborating with the propaganda aims of the National Socialists.

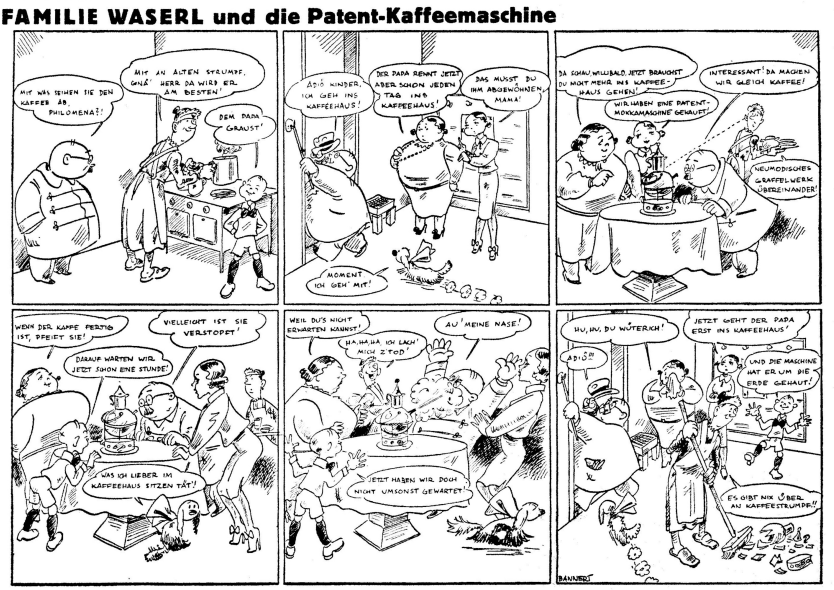

Fig. 15: "The Waserl Family and the Patent Coffee Machine," *Illustrierte Wochenpost* 25 Feb. 1938, p. 16. [22]

The German Reich

All the other newspapers underwent similar processes of *Gleichschaltung*—coordination with Nazi ideology—with the result that regardless of their

22 The strip's final appearance, drawn by Karl Bannert. The Waserls looked very different from the Riebeisels, and lacked any satirical aspect, although they were a similar constellation of parents, brother and sister, and know-it-all housekeeper. This strip is suspiciously like a Riebeisel strip of four years previously, right down to several lines of dialogue, leading up to the final explosion. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=iwp&datum=19380225&seite=16&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

original political orientations, all of Vienna's mass-market papers now bore the same headlines, stressed the same stories, and printed the same photos (Paupié 74). The common theme for the first few weeks of the *Anschluss* was the new "freedom" of the Austrian press from the supposed "Jewish yoke," making it truly German at last. Even the advertisements emphasized shops' Aryan ownership.

Newspapers whose outlooks or programs were incompatible with National Socialism were closed altogether; conservative papers that had supported the *Bundesstaat*, such as the reactionary *Reichspost*, were even less likely to survive than former Social Democratic organs that had been co-opted. Even while an Austrian identity separate from Germany was expunged, the remaining papers maintained a deceptive continuity; the mastheads, features and sections looked much the same—including comic strips. The children's comic strips were most visibly affected initially, with both *Bobby Bär* and *Bumsternazi*, once diametrically opposed politically, now proudly displaying swastika flags (see Fig. 16), though their enthusiasm was soon diverted into less overt, innocuous activities.

As for *Tobias Seicherl*, in March 1938 its protagonist was in the middle of another journey through Africa that now abruptly detoured through Palestine to indulge in several episodes of crassly anti-Semitic humour, flying in the face of every anti-Nazi cartoon that Ludwig Kmoch had ever drawn when *Das Kleine Blatt* was a Social Democratic paper; whether Kmoch was working hard to prove his political reliability or following editorial fiat is unknown, though he was reputedly personally an anti-Semite even in the earlier period (Havas and Sackmann 56-7). Seicherl's dog Struppi, previously always the voice of reason, was now as virulently bigoted as his master—and the anti-Jewish jokes continued as Seicherl went on to visit the United Nations in Geneva. The strip eventually went back, however, to alternating domestic incidents of slapstick comedy with lengthy journeys to exotic lands. Meanwhile, in *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*, *Wamperl und Stamperl* paid no attention to the *Anschluss* and continued much as before—although on 1 June 1938, only ten weeks after Austria was absorbed, Karl Theodor Zelger died of illness at only forty-nine years old.[23] The strip was continued without a break and in

23 Zelger's obituary in *Der Montag* emphasized that he was "Aryan," and claimed that his career as a painter had suffered under the supposedly Jewish-dominated "Schuschnigg-System" of the *Bundesstaat* ("A Death," *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag* 7 June 1938, 3).

Seite 18 — Nr. 78 Das Kleine Volksblatt Sonntag, 20. März 1938

SONNTAG DES KINDES.

Der Huflattich.

Auf dem Weg zur Schule war ein großer Schutthaufen. Der hat recht garstig ausgesehen. Im Winter hat man das freilich nicht gemerkt. Da ist ein schönes, weißes Schneetuch darübergelegen. Aber, wie die Sonne den Schnee weggetrunken hat, ist er ganz nackt und grau dagelegen. Er hat sich wohl selber geschämt, daß er so häßlich war, und hat sich ganz eng an den Gartenzaun angedrückt. „Pfui, der grausliche Haufen!" haben die Schulkinder gesagt, wenn sie auf dem Schulwege an ihm vorübergegangen sind.

Da ist aber auf einmal etwas Merkwürdiges geschehen. Ihr müßt nur wissen, in der Erde drin schlafen die Blumenkinder und warten, bis es Zeit ist für sie, herauszukommen. Vorher aber rauncen sie sich noch ein Weilchen aus und strecken Arme und Beinchen, gerade so wie die jungen Menschenkinder.

Unser Schutthaufen ist auf einem Bauplatze gelegen, der früher eine Wiese war. Eigentlich war der Bauplatz noch immer eine Wiese und hat wohl noch so lange eine Wiese bleiben müssen, bis der Herr, dem der Platz gehörte, genug Geld gespart hat, um damit ein Haus bauen zu können. Ihr könnt euch denken, daß da viele hundert Blumenkinder in der Erde geschlummert haben. Wie nun die Märzensonne so recht warm und lieblich geschcint hat, werden eine ganze Menge solcher Blümlein wach und guckcn auch schon mit ihren Köpflein ein bißchen heraus. Da hört eines von ihnen, wie gerade wieder ein Schulkind sagt: „Der grausliche Haufen!" und da hat ihm der Schutthaufen sehr leid getan. Schnell ist es zu seinen Schwesterlein gelaufen und hat zu ihnen gesagt: „Kommt, wir wollen den armen, grauen Haufen dort schmücken, damit er nicht gar so traurig aussieht." Und eins, zwei, drei... laufen, laufen alle Huflattichpflänzlein auf den Schutthaufen zu, und wo nur ein Plätzchen frei ist, setzt sich eines hin. Ei, da hat der Schutthaufen auf einmal ganz anders ausgesehen! Ueber und über war er besät mit heilgelben Blütensternen. Nein, das war eine Pracht! Der Schutthaufen hat sich so gefreut, wie ein Kind am Heiligen Abend.

Und wie die Schulkinder am nächsten Tag vorbeigekommen sind, da haben sie nicht wenig gestaunt. Alle sind stehengeblieben und haben die herrlichen Blumen bewundert. Bist du nicht auch darunter gewesen?

Nach einigen Wochen sind die gelben Blütensterne schlafengegangen. Aber sie haben ihren Schutthaufen deswegen nicht vergessen. Sie haben jetzt schöne, große, saftige Blätter herausgeschickt aus der Erde, die sind alle Tage größer geworden und haben den Schutthaufen ganz zugedeckt. Da war er schön grün den ganzen lieben Sommer lang.

Im nächsten Frühjahr kommen aber gewiß wieder die gelben Blütensterne. Geht dann nur hin und seht nach.

Dr. Hulda Mical.

Die Frühlingssonne leuchtet wieder,
Sie strahlt hell auf die Erde nieder,
Familie Maus macht alles schön,
Das könnt ihr hier im Bilde seh'n.

Athleten im Garten.

Ob es die ersten Schneeglöckchen oder die anderen Frühlingsblüher sind, die ihre Blattspitzen durch den winterharten Boden stecken — sie müssten um dieser Kraftleistung willen eigentlich bewundert werden. Denn diese zarten Pflanzentriebe bringen es fertig, selbst durch steinhart zusammengebackenen oder auch gefrorenen Boden zu dringen. Ebenso wie die Wurzeln an der Spitze Stromlinienform haben und außerdem „geölt", das heißt mit einem Schleim schlüpfrig gemacht sind, um im Boden leichter und besser vorwärtszukommen, sind auch die Blattspitzen für ihre Zwecke besonders ausgerüstet. Sie gleichen in ihrer Festigkeit Speeren, denn ihre Zellen sind stark verdickt und stärker als die anderen Teile des Blattes.

Die Goldmedaille für athletische Kraftleistungen müßte aber dem Löwenzahn verliehen werden, denn seine Blätter bringen sogar durch eine fünfzehn Zentimeter dicke Straßenteerdecke hindurch, um ans Tageslicht zu gelangen.

Aale wandern über Land.

Verschiedene Arten von Fischen, darunter auch Aale, können längere Zeit außerhalb des Wassers leben. Oft unternehmen sie regelrechte Wanderungen über Land von einem Gewässer zum anderen. In England gab es sogar schon einmal eine Zugverspätung, weil große Massen wandernder Aale bei hellem Tageslicht über den Bahndamm krochen und den Eisenbahnverkehr störten.

Der Kletterfisch „Anabas", der in Indien, Burma und auf den Inseln vor der südöstlichen Küste Asiens weit verbreitet ist, erklettert bei seinen Wanderungen über Land sogar gerade Baumstämme und ist imstande, hundert Meter Landstrecke in dreißig Minuten zurückzulegen.

Onkel Freddy spricht:

Liebe Nichten und Neffen! Nun braust seit Tagen ein ungeheurer Jubelsturm durch unser deutsches Oesterreich! Wir können die Ereignisse, die sich seit der Vorwoche bei uns abspielten, noch gar nicht fassen; aber eines wissen wir, und das ist uns Erklärung und Sinn genug: Unser deutsches Oesterreich, das wir so lieben, ist wieder heimgekehrt ins große Deutsche Reich! Der Führer und Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler hat uns es gesagt, und wir alle haben seine Stimme und sein Wort gehört, und viele von euch, meine lieben Freunde, haben das Glück gehabt, den geliebten Führer selbst zu sehen. Vergeßt nie diesen Tag, er wird euch eine dauernde Erinnerung bleiben euer Leben lang! Wie draußen in der Natur nun das Leben erwacht und dem schönen Frühling sich entgegensehnt, so ist nun unsere Heimat erwacht und wächst einer schöneren, glücklichen Zukunft entgegen! Ihr, die Jugend dieses Landes, seid die Gewähr dafür, daß die Begeisterung, die den Führer umtobt, auch bis in die spätesten Geschlechter fortlebe und nie erlösche. Ihr werdet euch nun sammeln in der Hitlerjugend, und ein starkes Bollwerk sein gegen alle Feinde. Wie bald wird es sein, daß viele von euch nun bald auch die Schönheiten des Deutschen Reiches sehen dürfen, die alten Städte, die alten Kulturorte Deutschlands, wenn die KdF.-Fahrten auch uns Oesterreicher ins Reich bringen werden. Wir wollen nun Gott danken, daß er auf so unblutige Weise unsere Heimat heimgeführt hat ins Reich und daß nun das ganze deutsche Volk zu Ostern eine wahre Auferstehung feiern darf für alle Zukunft. Wir aber wollen weiterarbeiten im Geiste der neuen Zeit, uns gegenseitig begeistern am neuen Reich. So schließt seinen heutigen Brief mit „Heil Hitler!" euer

Onkel Freddy.

Volkserhebung.

Bumsternazi samt Umgebung
Sah des ganzen Volks Erhebung:
Auch die Wahlleut' trag'n bereits
So wie alle Hakenkreuz'!

Vor des Kanzleramtes Stufen
Hörte er begeistert rufen:
„Hitler — heil! Ein Volk — ein Reich!"
Und da rief er mit sogleich!

Wie die Stadt, so die Provinz!
Und der Führer sagt in Linz,
Daß sich Oestreich, lang gepeinigt,
Wieder mit dem Reich vereinigt.

Freudig rief der kleine Bazi:
„Ich war immer schon ein Nazi!
Und ich muß in unsern Ländern
Weder Sinn noch Namen ändern!"

Fig. 16: "Bumsternazi: Exaltation of a People," *Das Kleine Volksblatt*, 20 Mar. 1938, p. 18, drawn by Theo Henning. [24]

the same resolutely apolitical spirit by Franz Kraft, whose rounded style with bold lines bore little resemblance to Zelger's, until September 1939; presumably the scripts were written by the same unknown hand.

By the autumn of 1938, even the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* ("Vienna's Latest News"), whose Nazi leanings went back to the days of the Republic (Paupié 84-5), was experimenting with comic strips, publishing Alois Negrelli's pantomime strip *Willi, Wulli und Walzl* from September 1938 ("The Surprise Goal," 20 Sept. 1938, 11) until February 1939. The three protagonists—two boys and a dog—cheered for Vienna's local football teams, even against teams from pre-*Anschluss* Germany, and the matches mentioned in the strip were always recent and real. Just as this internal sports rivalry began to resemble mild resistance to the Nazi state in the real world (Marschik 224), this strip was dropped. The same sentiments then surfaced in *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*, however, where Otto Bittner's *Herr Mayer* ran from April 1939 until late August 1940—from September to December 1939, he also appeared in the sister publication *Fussball-Sonntag*, once home to *Haxl*. Herr Mayer (or Maier—the spelling was inconsistent), a portly, moustached character with a cigarette holder whose prototype had long appeared in Bittner's cartoons, was as proudly Viennese as Haxl, with the dialect to prove it; and his love for football, above all for the team Rapid Wien, allowed little tolerance for *Piefkes* (as Austrians refer slightingly to Germans) from Berlin or Munich who rooted for their own teams (see Fig. 17). Bittner's strip ended just before German-Austrian football matches became sites of real-life rioting in September 1940 (Marschik 225). Both Negrelli and Bittner had been prolific veterans of Social Democratic and Communist periodicals in both Berlin and Vienna (Lorenz 141), and it may be by means of the slightly dissident content of these football-oriented strips that they resigned themselves to the many anti-Semitic and anti-British political cartoons they were required to produce for the *Nachrichten*.[25]

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24 In the last panel, Bumsternazi celebrates the *Anschluss*, claiming "I've always been a Nazi!" Less than two weeks previously, the paper had still supported Austrian independence. Bumsternazi's Nazism remained overt for almost two months before subsiding into apolitical adventures—but was rekindled briefly when the war broke out in 1939. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=dkv&datum=19380320&seite=18& zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

25 Otto Binder died of lung disease at the age of 40 on 17 January 1941; Rainer Negrelli was killed fighting on the Eastern front sometime in 1944.

Fig. 17: "Herr Mayer: Drat it!!," *Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag*, 22 July 1940, p. 4. [26]

In the last months before the war, the now-Aryanized *Illwo* made two more attempts to establish comic strips. From 1 April until 20 May 1939 the mysterious "Niessl" published eight episodes of *Didi*, a grotesquely drawn knock-off of Tobias Seicherl so intellectually stunted that laughing at his mishaps seems cruel. Didi's elongated bald head suggests some form of hydrocephaly, and in his second adventure, for example, it is supposed

26 Otto Bittner's work varied between detailed ink drawings with intense fields of black and quick, simple pencil sketches, drawn on whatever paper came to hand. Here Mayer's friend Herr Karl is surprised that Mayer is not in Berlin for the German championship semi-final; but since Mayer's beloved local team Rapid Wien has been shut out, he'd rather stay home and watch "genuine Viennese school" (a very different style of play from German teams), even if the team using that style is Bratislava. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=mon&datum=19400722&seite=4&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

to be comical that he is ejected from a streetcar after sexually assaulting a fellow passenger (see Fig. 18).

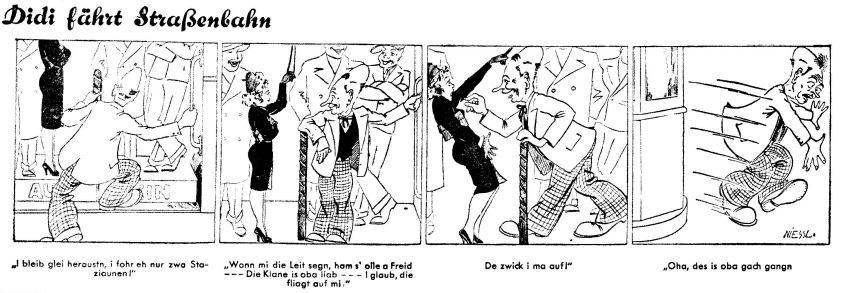

Fig. 18: "Didi Takes the Streetcar," *Illustrierte Wochenpost* 8 Apr. 1939, p. 10, drawn by "Niessl." [27]

Finally, eight episodes of *Ehepaar Maier*, by an unknown artist, appeared from 1 July to 26 August 1939. The elegantly rendered adventures of this physically mismatched middle-aged couple—she is imposing, while he is tiny and meek—are surprisingly strenuous, involving boating, hiking and biking, which makes for much of the strip's humour. In the final episode, they are riding a tandem bicycle uphill when her seat breaks and she falls off, leaving him to pedal away, triumphant and free (*Illustrierte Wochenpost* 26 Aug. 1939, 10). Whether or not the Maiers had been destined for further adventures, the *Illwo* itself ceased publication with this issue, a week before Hitler invaded Poland. Two days later came the last instalment of *Wamperl und Stamperl* in *Der Montag*, though the paper lasted until the end of 1940; during the last year of *Wamperl und Stamperl*, the strip's middle panel was frequently taken up by an advertisement for the *Illwo*, which at one point mentioned the *Ehepaar Maier* strip (*Der Montag mit dem Sport-Montag* 14 Aug. 1939, 12). Apparently, there was still some belief that comic strips were features that attracted readers.

Meanwhile, into the first few months of the war, the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* published another domestic comedy, Fritz Bock's *Onkel Theo-*

27 Despite Didi's bizarrely conical head, with its odd patches of hair, he assumes that a pretty fellow passenger finds him attractive; this leads him to "put the moves on her" (*zwicken* can also mean "to validate a ticket"), with immediate consequences. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=iwp&datum=19390408& seite=10&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

dor und seine werte Familie ("Uncle Theodor and his Worthy Family"), from 5 May 1939 until the end of the year. Bock contributed many gag comic strips to this and other papers in an idiosyncratic sharp-edged cartoon style, but this was his only attempt at continuing characters. Both Uncle Theodor and the other family members are continually overshadowed by the talking family dachshund Seppl, however, who is more obnoxious than endearing (see Fig. 19). Nonetheless, the strip lasted twenty-one episodes. The other "worthy" family members—Aunt Emma and son Heinzi—are not even named until they express their Christmas wishes in what turned out to be the penultimate episode before a final, bland New Year's greeting.

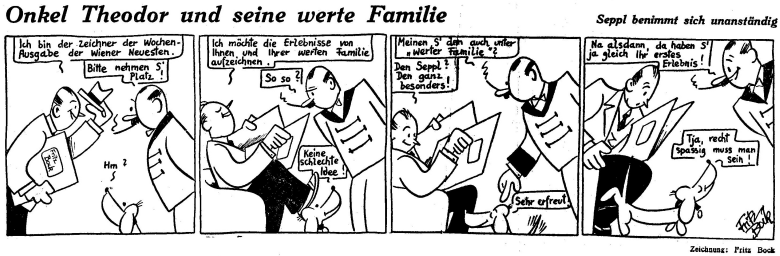

Fig. 19: "Uncle Theodor and his Worthy Family: Seppl Behaves Badly," *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* 12 May 1939, p. 34. [28]

Once the war began in September 1939, the children's comic strips became increasingly escapist. Theo Henning was replaced as artist on *Bumsternazi* by another painter, Franz Brazda, soon after the war broke out, and in the early weeks of the fighting, Bumsternazi cheered on German military victories, but as the conflict dragged on the strip became detached from reality and devolved into puerile gags. *Bobby Bär*, meanwhile, had made only subtle nods to Nazi ideology—although regardless of the readers' wishes, the captions were again printed in *Fraktur* from 7 May 1939 on—and now Bobby spent weeks travelling through fairy-tale kingdoms,

28 The artist Fritz Bock introduces himself in the first episode, and Seppl the dachshund obliges by lifting his leg on Bock. Seppl was clearly the strip's star, and more intelligent than his owners. Bock's angular style was unmistakeable, though he himself has so far been impossible to trace. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=wnn&datum=19390512&seite=34&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

ignoring the war altogether. *Bobby Bär* hung on until 17 August 1941, and *Bumsternazi* survived until 6 December of that year—the last few strips were drawn by *Das kleine Volksblatt*'s long-time cover artist, painter Karl Langer.

The adult strips, on the other hand, were doomed much sooner. Of those strips that survived the outbreak of the war, *Onkel Theodor* was gone by New Year's of 1940, and *Tobias Seicherl* appeared only intermittently after August 1939, when a trip through India was abruptly cut off, apparently because Ludwig Kmoch himself had been called up. When Seicherl returned a few weeks later, he was magically back in Vienna, confined to mild domestic mishaps in sporadic episodes, and he vanished for good on 6 May 1940 (with a short revival long after the war). There were no editorial explanations for these strips' cancellations.

Only one new comic strip appeared during the war—Kmoch's *Zeitgenosse Sauerhirn* ("Our Contemporary Sauerhirn"), which counted five episodes in *Das Kleine Blatt* between December 1941 and February 1942. The toothless, dyspeptic Sauerhirn, whose name means "sour-brain," is too selfish and venal to follow the rationing rules; whether the strip was making fun of coping with wartime rationing or the rationing itself was never clear. In any case, the strip quickly disappeared, though in its final episode Sauerhirn joins a long queue expecting that something is on offer—hopefully cigarettes. To his chagrin, it turns out to be a queue of Jews preparing to emigrate (Havas and Sackmann 57; see Fig 20).

In fact, by this point Jews were forbidden to emigrate from the German Reich, and the extermination camps in Chelmno and Auschwitz were already in operation. Although scurrilous anti-Semitism was a constant feature of editorial cartoons in Nazi Germany—including cartoons produced by many of the artists mentioned here—among Viennese comic strips with continuing characters only Kmoch's *Seicherl* and *Sauerhirn* ever contained overtly anti-Semitic elements; in all the other strips, after March 1938 Jews were simply absent. Even Kmoch's strips, however, lacked all the outward manifestations of the totalitarian state: there were no swastika flags or black uniforms, and nobody had a picture of Hitler on the wall, even in government offices. At the same time as these strips addressed their readers as consumers of particular newspapers, advertising themselves, after the *Anschluss* they additionally came to advertise an illusory normalcy in which membership in a unitary German *Volk* neither required nor permitted political consciousness; even those strips that appeared

apolitical therefore became part of the overarching Nazi system of control (Oggolder 68).

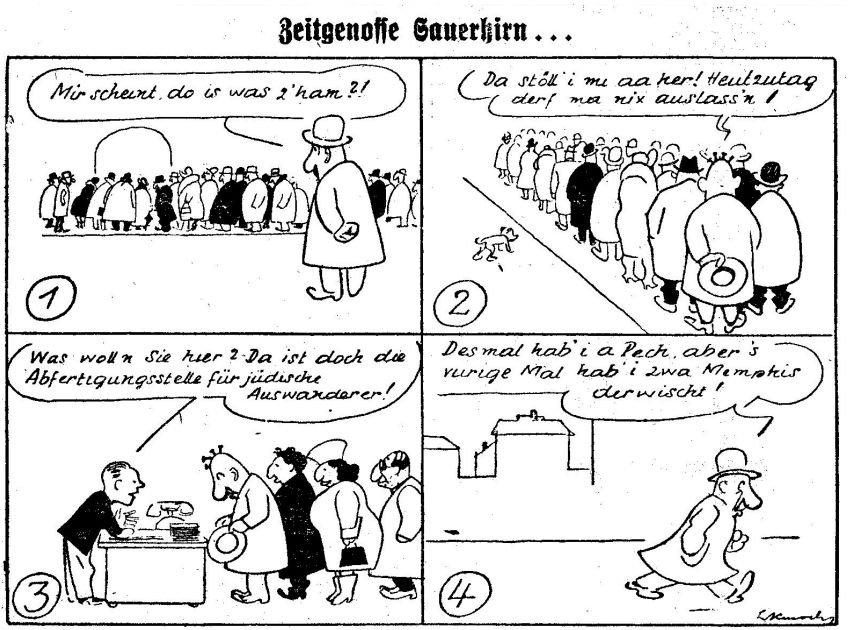

Fig. 20: "Our Contemporary Sauerhirn," *Das Kleine Blatt* 15 Feb. 1942, p. 6. [29]

Conclusion

Thus ignominiously ended the brief flowering of an expression of popular culture that remained largely isolated from the development of comics in Germany, and with a few exceptions, has yet to be thoroughly documented. Although attempts to found new comic strips increased even as the number of newspapers decreased, as shown in Fig. 21, no strip of any longevity, either for children or adults, was created after the Civil War of February 1934.

29 The final episode, drawn by Ludwig Kmoch. The greedy Sauerhirn mistakenly joins a queue of Jews seeking to emigrate. In the second panel, a dog in the street beside the lineup looks very much like Seicherl's dog Struppi, perhaps as a reminder of better times. A digital copy is available here: https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid= dkb &datum=19420215&seite=6&zoom=33 (ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

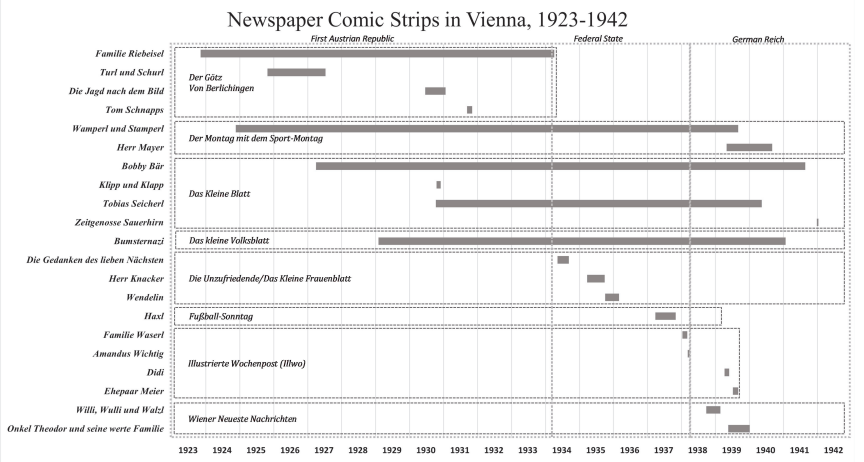

Fig. 21: Newspaper Comic Strips in Vienna, 1923-1942. [30]

It was once widely believed that the Nazis banned comics due to their American associations. On the one hand, however, comics remained relatively rare in German-speaking Europe prior to 1945 in any case, with Vienna serving as an unusually active locus for publishing comic strips; and on the other, wherever the Nazi state expanded—occupied France, for example, as well as Austria—it had no difficulty absorbing local comics into its propaganda regime as a conduit for disinformation, escapist entertainment, or both.[31] Comic strips disappeared between 1939 and 1942 not because the comic form was banned, but rather as newspapers dwindled in number, size and breadth of content due to consolidation and mergers, increasing paper rationing and censorship in general (Paupié 74-5).

30 Although the number of comic strips beginning increased even as censorship tightened and the number of newspapers declined, no strip founded after the end of the Republic enjoyed a lengthy run. The children's strips, *Bobby Bär* and *Bumsternazi*, were the longest-lasting, along with *Wamperl und Stamperl*; however, *Tobias Seicherl*, the only daily strip, achieved the most appearances, with more than 2,000 episodes, over half of them prior to February 1934.

31 Even the *Österreichischer Beobachter* ("Austrian Observer"), an Austrian National Socialist Party organ published illegally from 1936 and then openly from the *Anschluss* until late 1944, used comic strips from mid-1938 on, although none with continuing characters. This paper should not be confused with the infamous *Völkischer Beobachter* ("People's Observer), the major Nazi newspaper, which had its own Vienna edition after the *Anschluss*.

During its heyday, however, the Viennese newspaper landscape between the World Wars is unique for its surprisingly high frequency of American-style speech-balloon comic strips aimed at adult readers. The repeated attempts to create new strips, even after the *Anschluss*, would seem to indicate that in Vienna, comics were taken seriously as a medium, whether for journalism, entertainment, or propaganda, and that local content was regarded as important—hence the frequent use of the local dialect rather than standard German. Once authoritarianism displaced the Republic's original political conflicts, however, and comic strips no longer served either a satirical or a political-educational purpose, it proved extremely difficult to create new characters successfully. As with many other origins in German-language comics history, the politics of dictatorship and the disruption of war cut off any chance of creating a tradition. *Tobias Seicherl* enjoyed a brief revival from 1957 to 1961 in the newspaper *Wiener Woche* ("Vienna Week"; Havas and Sackmann 58-60); but despite its nostalgic popularity, it evoked no memories of the earlier flourishing of comic strips. Seicherl's compatriots and competitors remained forgotten, and are only now being rediscovered.

A more sustained examination of the newspaper comic strips of the period could take into consideration the many additional strips that did not have continuing characters, and which extended across an even broader political spectrum; as well as the fact that many of the artists named above also worked regularly as editorial cartoonists and/or as illustrators of children's books and serialized novels. In these functions, too, these largely forgotten artists participated in an increasingly modern and commodified consumer culture. Moreover, given that two-thirds of the comic strips described above—fourteen of twenty-one—appeared in weekly newspapers, such an examination might also contribute to a more complete picture of the Austrian weekly press.

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