Anachronism or sting in the flesh? The Remarkable Success of Austria’s Regional Communist Newspapers (1948-2000)

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„A newspaper, in which three political parties are lying, almost tells the truth”
– Ernst Fischer

Communist political influence outside the trade unions and local governing bodies has only been a short-lived thing in Austria; the remaining exponents of the party were even more marginalized by the leaving of prominent members after the Hungarian (1956) and – even more prominent – the Czech uprising against Soviet invasion in 1968. On the other hand the commercial activities of the party proved to be a success story not only regarding the export-deals with the German Democratic Republic (DDR), producing a 300 million Euro-fortune, but also on a smaller scale. The WB-Holding, as commercial arm of the party, was and is divided into six groups, each working on different commercial fields ranging from real estate to an oil refinery with an own chain of filling stations („Turmöl“). By far the most important and publicly known activity however was the post-war publishing company „Globus“, bundling the propagandistic efforts of the KP. The then very modern printing house in Vienna declined, as the COMECON-partners collapsed in 1989 and the following years brought a loss of lucrative dealings even with partners as far as Mongolia. While the former flagship „Volksstimme“ („People’s voice“) had therefore to be transformed from a daily to a weekly paper, a group of local newspapers

1 „Eine Zeitung, in der drei Parteien lügen, sagt fast schon die Wahrheit.”

2 Communist secretary of State in 1945, MP and later expelled from the Communist Party after his criticism of the Warsaw Pact-invasion in Prague 1968. He was also editor in chief of „Neues Österreich“ (New Austria), a post war-publication shared by Conservative, Socialist and Communist Party

3 Original German/Austrian names of institutions will be given in parentheses. Otherwise important Austria Names, e.g. of newspapers, will be translated, if possible

4 This is the sum, Germany as legal successor of the former second German state, sued the KPÖ for. The process in Berlin ended in favour of the KPÖ in first instance, the German Treuhand-Anstalt went to the German High Court as last resort.

5 Papers which were published by or at least close to the KPÖ (regional papers are given in bold letters): „Österreichische Volksstimme“, „Wahrheit“, „Neue Zeit“, „Volkswille“, „Salzburger Tagblatt“, „Tiroler Nachrichten“, „Vorarlberger Tagesnachrichten“, „Der kleine Landwirt“, „Der Sozialrentner“, Schwarzwataler Bezirksbote“, „Badner Rundschau“, „Schwechater Nachrichten“ (later: Rundschau Schwechat), „Sankt Pöltner Nachrichten“ (later: Unser St. Pölten), „Wr. Neustädter Nachrichten“, „Österreichische Zeitung“, „Der Abend“, „Österreichisches Tagebuch“, „Stimme der
produced profits until 2001, when they were sold – to the Catholic church! How the owner’s influence mirrored the political tendencies in Central Europe, how the journalists were personally affected by interventions and how the sales of these papers by far outnumbered the number of politically left readers in the region will be examined by this article. Especially as there is „no scientific publication of its own, neither concerning the „Volksstimme” or any other newspaper of the Globus Verlag, although the newspaper-market of the Second Republic cannot be imagined without these papers [...]” (KÖSTNER 2001, S.161)

Political Tendencies and their filtered echo

To understand the history and the presumable role of the regional KP-papers, one has to look at the time of their founding (1948) and the history of the party. During the years after the Second World War and especially after the beginning Cold War in Europe following the Communist take-over in Prague in 1948, the climate between the four Allied Forces in Austria deteriorated. Whereas French plans to fortify the alpine regions of Vorarlberg and the Tyrol were made up, the Americans feared for the security of the prominent airbases Schwechat and Langenlebarn, both in the Russian Zone. Of course several Secret Service activities and a lot of smaller incidents between the occupation forces found their way into the press. One important factor was that that only the Moscow Communists had a political apparatus in Austria, the KP, whereas the United States (as the most influent Western player, but this is also true for Great Britain and France) had to deal with the Austrian parties to gain their support – and of course the other way.

The Austrian KP was founded on Nov., 3rd 1918 and its first public action was to seize control over the redaction of the „Neue Freie Presse” , one of the major papers in the Habsburg Empire and still existing today. In these early years the Communist movement saw itself more as a local part of the Soviet-led Internationale than an political body of its own, even refusing to take part in the first elections, considered to be „bourgeois”. 22.000 votes for the parliamentary

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6 Translation of quotations are by the author.
7 For this period of time cf. the essay by Edda Engelke, using Russian Secret Service material on famous cases as the deportation of Margarethe Ottilinger for the first time, in SCHMIDL, 2000
8 Today the paper is known as „Die Presse“, a conservative quality paper, regarded as the „central-organ of the Capitalistic system in Austria” by the Communist historical society Alfred Klahr-Gesellschaft. The „Neue Freie Presse” by the way was the favourite object of Karl Kraus’ criticism of journalism in his journal „Fackel” and also the famous „Letzte Tage der Menschheit” („Last days of Mankind”)
elections in 1923 do not show a realistic picture of the party’s members between the wars. The greatest number was achieved in 1934, 12,000 disappointed socialists joining the KP, when the Socialist Party was forbidden as a result of the civil uprising in February. The eve of Nazi occupation also brought a peak of the journalistic activities: 132 papers, most of them for workers in the large factories („Betriebszeitungen”) reached 160,000 copies. The post-war KP saw the heyday of their political power, not only producing „red” ministers in the federal government, but also in some regional parliaments (the most prominent example is Vienna’s legendary Stadtrat - councillor for Culture – Viktor Matejka) and of course municipal councils. The expectation for the coming elections was high, the Soviet ones even higher, as Ernst Fischer recalls a visit at Marshall Konjev’s HQ in 1945: „Molotov expects 30 to 35 percent.” - „How can Molotov expect such a result?” „The Soviet Union has done so much for Austria, that his expectation is justified. Or are you doubtful, Comrade Fischer? What’s your estimation?” - „I will be happy, if we gain 8 to 10 percent of the votes”. (FISCHER 1972, p. 162).

The problem was the close ties to the Soviet army and their exponents both in Austria and to the political leaders in Moscow, as most relevant figures of the post-war KP came from an Eastern exile, not the Scandinavian countries or Great Britain. Therefore the KP paid the price for crimes and economic devastation.

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9 between 4,800 and 20,000 (a one time high immediately after WW I) were registered members, although the number of participants in strikes led or co-organised by the KP was much higher in those times of social discontent.
10 for the history of Communist publications between the wars see SELBER 1991 (esp. p. 88-109)
11 174,257 votes in 1945 meant 5,41 % or 4 seats in the Austrian parliament, the regional elections brought Communist seats in Lower Austria, Vienna, Carinthia, Styria, Salzburg and Burgenland (showing thus an East-West gap, as there was no success in the alpine provinces of Vorarlberg and the Tyrol). Also the members rose to 155,000 (in 1947).
12 The last remaining today is Ernst Kaltenegger, responsible for public housing in Austria’s second largest City, Graz, capital of Styria, a traditionally important area for the KPÖ.
13 Contrary to that, the political counsellor Kiselev, who worked for Marshall Konjev, hold the estimation of President Karl Renner (20% for the KPÖ) two days before the election „without any doubt for exaggerated” (cf. SBKA, Sondersammlung Russisches Außenministerium, Lunkov to Dekanosov, 24. 11. 1945). For Oliver Rathkolb at least the political officers „were in no way totally surprised” („in keiner Weise völlig überrascht”) by the weak result for the KP (RATHOLB 1998, p. 152). This estimation is backed by the reports, the Czech Communists sent the Soviets about their expectations for 1945’s election in Austria (cf. DAVID, 2002, p. 108).
14 Long-time minister of foreign affairs under Stalin
15 „Molotow rechnet mit 30 bis 35 Prozent.” - „Wie kommt Molotow zu diesem Ergebnis?” „Die Sowjetunion hat für Österreich so viel getan, daß seine Erwartung berechtigt ist. – Oder zweifeln Sie daran, Genosse Fischer? Was also schätzen Sie?“ „Ich werde glücklich sein, wenn wir acht bis zehn Prozent der Stimmen gewinnen”
(namely in the USIA-factories\textsuperscript{16}) committed by the Red Army or political exponents from the USSR, instead of gaining profit from the heroic effort Communists made in the resistance movement against the Nazis. In their official history, the KP indirectly refers to this fact: „\textit{Under Cold War-conditions, when Anti-Communism and Anti-Sovietism formed an inseparable symbiosis, the feeling of fellowship was strengthened.}“ (HISTORISCHE KOMMISSION BEIM ZENTRALKOMITEE DER KPÖ 1987, p.385)\textsuperscript{17}.

The journalistic activities however showed a remarkable 450.000 copies of all Communist weeklies and dailies by that time. Globus, Zeitungs-, Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Ges.m.b.H. was founded on 1. August, 1945, and took over Steyrermühl Verlag, a printing company founded 1872 and granted the KP by the authorities. The capital was shared between the secretary of state Johann Koplenig, Siegfried Fürnberg, KPs central-secretary, and Erwin Zucker, managing editor of the Globus. Four days later the central-organ „Österreichische Volksstimme“ (Austrian People’s Voice) appeared for the first time. Globus also got control over the Tagblatt-Verlag, since 1923 producing paperbacks with legal texts, opera-texts and non-fiction books. This heritage also contained odd titles like „Nach der Arbeit“ („After work“ – an illustrated weekly for Gardening, Housing and Pets) and „Sport-Tagblatt“ („Daily Sports“). In the beginning even large enterprises as Persil and the federal railways were clients of the printing company, assuming that the pro-Soviet management would not run out of paper, one of the main materials in post-war Austria. (KÖSTNER 2001, p. 33). The old Globus was later part of the WB-Wirtschaftsbeteiligungs GmbH, who had also to take over the morbid building of the company (in 1956 Vienna’s most modern printing press) – close to the men’s asylum in the Meldemannstraße, where Adolf Hitler stayed in his Viennese years – which had its last great appearance as setting for a weird TV talk show in 1995.

The local Lower Austrian papers were published in the „Ring nö. Wochenzeitungen“, shortly „Ring“. In the further lines of the article I will concentrate on the local issues in Wiener Neustadt and Neunkirchen, the „Wiener Neustädter Nachrichten“ and „Schwarzataler Bezirksbote“; those were by far the most important titles, also the structure of the regions showed a strong left, mainly Social-democratic, but especially the large factories in Wiener Neustadt made the industrial city a centre of left politics even in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The General Strike of 1918 started here, one of the few attempts to back the Hungarian and Bavarian „Räte-Republic“ took place here and some of the most impressive gatherings of workers were held on the main square of Lower Austria second-largest city. The October-Strike in 1950, regarded as an attempted Communist coup d’etat by some, also found one of his centres in Wiener

\textsuperscript{16} A large industrial complex formed out of over 300 Austrian enterprises, occupied by the Soviets, meaning: „\textit{Administration of the Soviet Fortune in Austria (Uprawljonje Sowjetskowo Imuschtschestwo Awstrii)}“

\textsuperscript{17} „\textit{Unter den Bedingungen des Kalten Krieges, in dem Antikommunismus und Antisowjetismus eine untrennbare Symbiose eingingen, wurde das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl gestärkt}“
Neustadt. For the Soviets the city was one of the main „It has to be pointed out, that the majority of industrial enterprises (especially of the armament industry) are situated in the Soviet Zone (in the East of Vienna as well as in the cities Wiener Neustadt and Kapfenberg). Furthermore the Soviet Zone is linked by rail to Czechoslovakia, in the South to Yugoslavia and to the East with Hungary.” (SBKA, Sondersammlung Russisches Außenministerium, The chairman of the Armistice-Commission to Molotov, 25. 5. 1944, RATHKOLB 1998, p. 143).

In the first elections, the KPÖ could gain the vice-mayor and two city-councillors. But this was not representative for the country; until the 1959 elections four, since 1953 three parliamentary seats were hold, but 142,578 votes (3,27%) brought the end of Communist MPs in Austria. Also regional dailies had to be closed by the end of the Fifties in the latest, and the only remaining journals were the weeklies in Lower Austria.

Those were led by local KP-officials, in most cases also with a seat in the local governing body, as long-time editor Erich Sameck (1957-1985) in Wiener Neustadt or the journalists of the „Schwarzataler Bezirksbote”, Alfred Matzinger (1957-74) or Reinhard Hanickl (1988-1994). The distribution was made in a rather new way: Party members or simple workers sold them on a tour from door to door (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p. 26). As Karl Flanner, journalist and party official until his 1968’s leaving for „different views” recalls, „people awaited them, every time one could find new readers (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p.26). This was partly due to the fact, that the newspapers nearly strictly defended the workers needs and were clever enough to start „campaigns”, which lasted for weeks and forced the politicians to give in. Therefore it was especially easy for the „Ring”-papers to fit

18 The report of one of the leading members involved in the strike, Karl Flanner, is found in WNN Nr. 7 (page 2) from 14. February 1969, when the striking worker’s nemesis, Socialist secretary of the construction workers, Franz Olah, had to face a trial for fraud, concerning union money: „We were accused in those day, but there was no trial against us, which saved the government from ignominy. Communist MP Honner refused his parliamentary immunity, so he could be put on trial on behalf of the „coup d’etat”. They had good reasons to refuse this.”

19 „Es muss darauf hingewiesen werden, dass sich in der sowjetischen Zone die Mehrzahl der Industriebetriebe (insbesondere der Rüstungsindustrie) befinden (im östlichen Teil Wiens sowie in den Städten Wiener Neustadt und Kapfenberg). Außerdem ist die sowjetische Zone durch Eisenbahmlinien mit der Tschechoslowakei, nach Süden mit Jugoslawien und nach Osten mit Ungarn verbunden“. The manufactured goods, important for the Third Reich, were mainly tenders and the legendary Messerschmitt-planes ME 262 and ME 109, partly built with hard labour-workers and concentration camp-inmates.

Concerning the importance for international traffic: Wiener Neustadt is still one of the most important railway-hubs in Austria; also many a prisoner of war arrived back in Austria via this city, when they were released in Russia.

20 For the development of the Austria CP and its fading political influence contrary to the role of other Western CPs see LANZINGER, M. „Aufstieg und Niedergang des Eurokommunismus im sozioökonomischen Umfeld Italiens (im Vergleich zur Enwicklung der KPÖ), Vienna, 1991
Morris Janowitz definition of a „community paper” according to which „the community press helps to maintain local community activity and identifications and to interrelate them to non-local activities and identifications” (JANOWITZ 1952, p. 10). This was easy considering the historic-materialistic world-view. But how did the party shine through and influence the journalistic work?

The party’s organ or independent journalists?

As long as the Communists in the local municipal governments were also journalists, the question of party influence is easily answered – at least on the surface. In „their” newspapers the Communist politicians could not only promote their point of view, but also report about the outcome of the monthly meeting of this council. But it was seen differently – at least from a distance, as later interviews prove: „The editor of the WNN is the KPÖ, but nevertheless they don’t consider themselves as a Communist weekly. They should make the contradictions of the class society visible, but by no means as an official party-organ” (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p. 90), Erich Sameck recalls. In the beginning, it was not important, that it were the Communists, who lend poor and heavily affected victims of the war their voice, but that it was made at all. And this struggle went on for a long time, regardless of the outcome of the elections, which were not in favour of the KPÖ, even if the newspapers became very popular. One of the rare occasions, when the Austrian public looked at the local Communists was the „Prague Spring” and the invasion of Soviet-led troops. After a remarkable polemic among the party, leading men left the KP, even the „Volksstimme” lost a lot of their reporters. Summing up, Christina Köstner wrote: „As in the KPÖ itself; those who remained by then, were mainly Stalinists or left-wing extremists” (KÖSTNER 2001, p. 68).

In that situation the local newspapers brought only the official news (that means: at first against the Soviet invasion and pro Ernst Fischer, who spoke of a

21 „Der Herausgeber der WNN ist die KPÖ, als kommunistisches Wochenblatt betrachten sie sich aber trotzdem nicht. Sie sollen zwar die Widersprüche unserer Klassengesellschaft sichtbar machen, aber dies keinesfalls in Form eines offiziellen Parteiorgans”.

22 Recently those events and the reaction of Austria’s politicians, including a severe crisis between the two later presidents of Austria, Rudolf Kirchschläger (then minister in Prague, saving many dissidents by providing Austrian visa) and Kurt Waldheim (1968 minister of foreign affairs, trying not to provoke the COMECON-world by refusing the visa) are treated in Klaus Eisterer’s „The Austrian Legation in Prague and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968” (p. 214-235 in: BISCHOF/PELINKA/WODAK 2001) and especially Martin David’s thesis “Österreichisch-tschechoslowakische Beziehungen 1945 bis 1974 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung aktueller Themen”, Vienna, 2002. For the first time Czech and Austrian material, a part of it still confidential, were used to present a sound picture of the somewhat confuse reaction of official Austria as well as of the KPÖ (cf. DAVID 2002, p. 223-260).

23 „Übrig geblieben sind damals wie in der KPÖ selbst in erster Linie Stalinisten und Linksradikale”
„tank-Communism”, and the contradictory article about the expulsion of Fischer from the KP later), declaring that the local Communists had voted against the exclusion of prominent party-members. As a strategy against the discussions that followed, they local papers brought a series of articles about spies against the CSSR in the beginning of 1969 (WNN 1/69, 3. January) as well as big reports about the following 20. Party Congress. In the issue from 2. May 1969 the Lower Austrian Communist however showed some dissent and implicit critique: „Regarding the case of our neighbouring countries they try to realise, that the Communists will, if the one day they have the power to do so, talk and act totally different. And also examples in the past of the KPÖ seem to proof for a lot of people, that the KPÖ could change its views if there is a change of politics in the Soviet Union eventually”.24

In a direct way, the Communists were only visible in reports from villages, where they were present in a political body, or in some special pages, were they reported international events. This was a kind of curious, as this page was always showing an actress or some other attractive woman (which was of course a reason for many a reader to purchase this publication, as interviews with older people proof) alongside some recent political event. Pictures of tanks and the underline „Hanoi bombed again”, describing a photo of the Vietnam war, so made their way alongside a portrait of Gina Lollobrigida, wearing a swim-suit. This international tendency was very strong in the Fifties, when the Korean War and other Colonial struggles seemed to prove the rightness of Communist theories. This was also the time of international youth games and visits from foreign factories in Austria. Instead of reporting directly about the reasons of the Hungarian uprising on 1956, a visit from such a delegation was used to produce feelings against those counter-revolutionaries: „They had their first adventure shortly after the border-station in a restaurant in Neufeld. Because of a flat tire of the bus, they had to wait. Shortly after they took place and started speaking, two guests came up to them. They told their home-mates, that during the last few months they went trough bitter deception. The praises of Paradise named Austria, had been sung of otherwise by Radio Free Europe. Now there’s the bad end: homesickness...(SBB Nr. 13/1957)25. That it were not always strict ideological views that dictated the contents of the KPÖ-owned local newspapers,

24 „Am Beispiel der Nachbarstaaten glaubt man zu erkennen, dass die Kommunisten, wenn sie einmal die Macht dazu haben, völlig anders reden und handeln. Und auch Beispiele aus der Vergangenheit der KPÖ scheinen vielen Menschen zu beweisen, dass etwa mit einer veränderten Politik der Sowjetunion auch die KPÖ ihre Auffassungen wieder ändern könnte.“

but also personal acquaintances, show some golf-lessons that were printed weekly in the Sixties, because the newly opened course for the „bourgeois” game was promoted by two personal friends of the editor.

In the Eighties the party influence was reduced and only some external articles showed the political ties (e.g. during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the French Communist leader George Marchais wrote about his view). But of course there is no rule without exemptions: On the eve of the 1980’s local election in Wiener Neustadt, the front-page did not only show the Communist candidate and a claim to vote for him, also a voting card with his name was to be found inside. It was regarded as a „gossip- and combat-paper” (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p. 92) by the journalists. The party, namely one person, Karl Flanner, a local historian writing about the working class, also stressed efforts to give „Historical Supplements”, which meant that they did not present the emperors and governments, but the everyday problems of working people throughout the history. As the KP also stood for culture for the working class, the local reader could find articles and short stories by Karl Kraus and Anton Cechov as well as Joseph Roth side to side with reports about a local sculptor, who got two whole pages for a artistic manifest in 1969.26

For Elisabeth Kirchmeir, who not only made a analysis of the contents, but also a survey among the readers of the WNN, the result was clear: „Declared Communist propaganda is read, but critically judged. The reader recognises this content as a political party’s one and refers to it from an outsider’s point of view” (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p. 76).27

A journalistic story of success, not a political one

The figures for the five newspapers were impressive. When the Media-Analysis was started in Austria, the „Ring” joined as one of the first. The five issues had 155,000 readers in 1988, which meant a total of 2,5 % of the Austrian population (about three times the number of Communist voters). Even more impressive, 10,8 % of the Lower Austrian population regularly read the papers, which only appeared in five of 26 districts of the country. In the heyday, 60% of the households in the Neunkirchen-region read the „Schwarzataler Bezirksboten”, then printed in 17,000 issues a week.

Even the Conservative Party (ÖVP) had to pay its tribute to the red journals, as a prominent member, mayor and former party-secretary for whole Lower Austria,

26 In that time the WNN consisted of 24 pages only!
27 „Deklariert kommunistische Propaganda–Inhalte werden gelesen, aber kritisch beurteilt. Der Leser erkennt diese Inhalte sehr wohl als parteipolitisch und rezipiert sie aus der Sicht des Außenstehenden“.
Walter Zimper, himself also editor of a local newspaper-company had to admit in an interview about Erich Samecks time as chief editor (1957-1985): „He succeeded in the art of writing for a political minority and gaining the majority of readers” (WNN 1998, p. 27). The other districts made no difference; as early as 1950, three years after the foundation, the Neunkirchen based „Schwarzataler Bezirksbote”, serving the interests of coal-miners and steel-workers in the region, was used when a deceased member of the Chamber of Commerce – the class enemy’s political organisation – received his public commemoration (SBB Nr. 6/1950). This is even more astonishing, as the political opponents in the old times still used to have their arguments in a physical manner also. No wonder, that SBB-editor Franz Benczik not only had two entrances to the redaction, both secured by double doors with four (!) door-chains and keys, but also kept a loaded gun in his working desk all the time.

One of the factors for the success of the „left boulevard”, as chief editor, Erick Sameck, characterised the writing of the newspapers was the orientation on the needs of the proverbial „little man”. Headlines as „Lower the bread-price” or „A new pair of trousers for Peter” in the Fifties changed to those of the Seventies and Eighties (when the workers had their income guaranteed and wanted to take advantage of the leisure-time):

„This is a crime: More than 1000 leaking barrels of poison!” (WNN 1998, p. 18),
„Official digging reveals: Still chemical waste at Euro-Quarz” (SBB 1998, p. 12)

Contrary to other local publications, the Communist journalists were eager to measure their journalistic power with the politically and economically powerful of those days. Regarding the following definition of the political potential of local media in the Sixties and Seventies, for the „Ring”-newspapers the pure opposite was true: „The seemingly official character of reporting, the lacking of arguments, the over-presentation of mere statements, which are given in a certain emphasis [...] characterises the local news as pre-democratic, quasi-absolutistic expression of local affairs.” (ZOLL 1971, p. 262). As there was no central redaction for the local papers, not even the size of the local issues was the

28 „Er schaffte das Kunststück, für eine politisch Minderheit zu schreiben und die Mehrheit der Leser auf sich zu vereinen“
29 As one of his successors, Hellfried Mayer, recalled during an interview with the author on Sunday, 28. April 2002. He also showed me the still existing door with the special locking-mechanisms, „protecting” the centrally located redaction, on that occasion.
30 „Das ist kriminell: Über 1000 lecke Gifffässer“
31 „Trinkwasser: Sind die „Schäden“ noch verkraftbar?“
32 „Amts-Bagger bestätigt: Immer noch Gifmül bei „Euro-Quarz”“
33 „Der offiziöse Charakter der Berichterstattung, der Mangel an Begründungen, das Übergewicht an Behauptungen, die mit besonderem Nachdruck vorgebracht werden [...] charakterisiert die Lokalteile als vordemokratischen, quasi-absolutistischen Ausdruck der lokalen Verhältnisse.“
same (!), the local journalist decided, how intensely he wanted to treat a topic in his region.

Also the strong support for every kind of sport and the early backing of youth movements brought the „Pravda“, as the Wiener Neustädter Nachrichten was nick-named, a broad support and a modern image. Weekly hit-parades of young citizens were a regular part of the newspaper in the Sixties as well as opinion-polls („Is there still interest in virgins?“) and the local papers also maintained a ball of their own once a year! When the IFES-Institute held an opinion poll for the City of Wiener Neustadt, 65 % of the young read the WNN (of a total of 56% of the population), workers (64%) and Socialist voters (62%) were also over-represented (KIRCHMEIR 1991, p. 96).

Continuity was another important characteristic of the Ring niederösterreichischer Wochenzeitungen and NÖ. Rundschau in the old days; Karl Bous (1948-1957), Alfred Matzinger (1957-1974), Franz Benczik (1974-1988), Reinhard Hanickl (1988-1994) and Hellfried Mayer (1994-2001) were in charge of the Neunkirchen branch, in Wiener Neustadt Erich Sameck was in charge of the newspaper from 1957 to 1985, followed by Maria Schicker (until 1989) and her son Franz, who tore his small member’s card of the Communist party to pieces during the „mud-wrestling“ affair. He was the second editor in chief not present in the local government of the city, although – at least on the paper – party-member. The tendency to separate party officials and journalists in the beginning of the Eighties produced a lot of tension between the county committee (Bezirksleitung) and the redaction. Even worse, the third axe consisting of the national Central committee (Bundesleitung) could influence both sides and was not always in favour of the local party – as well as a leading figure, financial spokesman Bruno Guth – came from Wiener Neustadt, but had his personal focus on the gross income more than on seemingly uninteresting local ideological details.

The most severe interventions were linked through the same crisis, which was over-exaggerated by the party and was even then – in 1990 – ridiculous. The cover-photo was a very „good“ shot of two women engaged in a mud-fight. A local discotheque used this then quite popular spectacle to increase the number of guests and was also an important client of the newspaper. The Democratic Women’s Front (Bund demokratischer Frauen) protested on various fronts and during one of the more and more formal Monday’s meetings between chief editor and local party, Schicker refused to apologize for his severe „violation of the dignity of women“. The result was that the party sent a replacement for Schicker, who proved to be a young „Volksstimme“-journalist (Bernhard Mautz), who had the nerve to attend local celebrations (100th anniversary of Wiener Neustadt’s hospital) with a red star on his pullover and a belt showing hammer and sickle.

34 WNN 17/69
35 Guth used to have his own column in the WNN, named „Gut(h) zu lesen“, a hardly translatable game on words, meaning „good to read“
This episode was over soon, but sales further deteriorated as once again a Communist politician, Liane Buchwitz, took over the editor’s chair. Things had to be formally arranged in March 1992, when another non-party-member succeeded Buchwitz. The deal was to grant the party one prominent page (Nr. 7) for their views and of course some place for the weekly announcements of the Communist organisation for the Aged (Zentralverband der Pensionisten). This seemed to work – instead of writing their own stories about the municipal council, the gave an interview about it) – and in 1992 a new company with nearly no political, but only financial links to the Communist party was the employer of the former „red” journalists: The Nö. Rundschau was born out of the ashes of the old „Globus”-empire. Recruitment of boulevard-journalists from the short-lived „Täglich alles”36, a modern layout, investments in the technical infrastructure and new bureaus were to follow, the conflicts between Communists (now everywhere outside any political body except for some unions) and journalists ended and if they had anything to say, they sent a letter which was presented alongside those of „normal” readers.

**Epilogue**

In the beginning of October 2000 the journalists were surprised by the announcement of a take-over of the publishing house by its long-time competitor, the NOEN, more than 90% of its shares under control of the episcopate of the Lower Austrian capital Sankt Pölten. So the journalistic tale of two weeklies struggling like Don Camillo and Peppone in Guareschis stories (and of course the even more famous films based upon them) came to an end37. So Austria’s richest party not only sold its journalistic patrimony, even the quarterly party-folder „Der springende Punkt” (which was directly mailed to every household) was transformed into a newsletter for sympathisants only. The effect: The only way of reaching a regional public for the KPÖ are nowadays advertisements in the journal of the Catholics. Only the names of the once-proud flagships of the „left boulevard” survived until today.

**Literature:**

I am grateful for the papers and information, that were provided by former „Ring”-journalist Mag. Elisabeth Kirchmeir (Großhöflein), chief editor Hellfried Mayer (Neunkirchen) and Mag. Christina Köstner (Vienna. Without their help – and some useful historic remarks by Dr. Martin David (Wiener Neustadt) – this publication would have been impossible or at least not as informative and profound.

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37 Although the NÖ. Rundschau is treated as a stepchild - and not even present on the official website’s (www.noen.at) listing of all newspapers owned by the Catholic „Pressehaus” – the take-over of its old foe made it possible to acquire a monopole over the local weeklies in Lower Austria, Austria’s largest federal state.
Archives:
The issues of the newspapers („Ring”, later „Nö. Rundschau”) are either kept in the Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, or at the local successors of the newspapers, „Wiener Neustädter Nachrichten“, Adlergasse 3/2, A-2700 Wiener Neustadt and „Schwarzataler Bezirksbote”, Fabriksgasse 3-5, A-2620 Neunkirchen. SBKA (Stiftung Bruno Kreisky Archiv), Sondersammlung, Russisches Außenministerium, Vienna

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