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Aryanization in Vienna

Aryanization is but one of several terms the Nazis used to refer to the process of driving out Jewish citizens of German social and economic life. In the end this process led to the final solution and the murder of six million Jews. That is why for historians like Raul Hilberg aryanization, which meant in particular the dispossession and later the quasi-legal expropriation of Jews, represents a crucial stage in the development of National Socialist anti-Jewish policy, as the situation of Jews being completely deprived of their economic basis was an important precondition for the greatest genocide of human history.

During the first years of the Nazi-rule in Germany, aryanization especially of Jewish businesses had the character of a more or less voluntary transaction of Jewish property to an "Arian" German, which took place under "fair" conditions, given the circumstances. But with the growing consolidation of the Nazi regime, aryanization became more and more similar to the dispossession of Jews leaving them with less and less means to either finance their emigration or make a living inside Germany. From 1938 on, especially after the November-pogrom, aryanization became the official term for the quasi-legalized compulsive expropriation of Jews, not only in Germany, but also in the territories occupied by the Nazis.

According to some historians the measures Nazi authorities took in Vienna after the "Anschluss" in 1938 became the model for new laws passed later that year which were part of the radicalization of anti-Jewish politics. In the interpretations of those historians these measures were a reaction to the very virulent anti-Semitism of a large number of Austrians, which during the first weeks of the German rule in what was to become the "Ostmark" found its expression in "wild aryanizations" of Jewish property that had sometimes the character of plain and simple looting .

The so called "Vienna Model" tends to be interpreted in a rather structuralist way, i.e. that aryanization in the long run was more the outcome of anti-Semitism or pure greed of the ordinary German (or Austrian) population than a clear objective of Nazi ideology. In my paper I want to try to elucidate the initial intentions of circles like the SD, which was represented in Vienna almost immediately after the "Anschluss" by Adolf Eichmann, or those around people like Karl Kaufmann, the "Gauleiter" of Hamburg, who looked forward to the occupation of new territories like Austria, in order to expand their particular economic interests and activities. In fact a large number of the more lucrative aryanizations in Vienna were carried out by Germans rather than Austrians. Thus Vienna became in the words of Karl Schleunes "... the laboratory in which new ideas concerning the Jewish problem was tested." The aggressive attitude of many Austrians towards Jews was thus a welcome fact in the radicalization of anti-Jewish policies, even if at a certain stage it endangered the economic interests of the Nazi authorities.