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Summary

Dr. Ernst Mihalkovits, historian, born on September 23, 1936 in Ritzing.

Other than his parents and grandparents, most people in Ritzing welcomed the Anschluss (Annexation). His family were social democrats and viewed the developments in Austria with some reservations. His parents often talked about how Johann Bauer, a Christian Social Politician, was treated. With his hands cuffed behind his back, the Nazis drove Bauer triumphantly through the town square and placed him in protective custody. Most of the people of Ritzing took the Annexation as a reasonable move. After all, they said, Hitler was Austrian. They were out of work, had no money, and were not able to collect unemployment benefits. Mihalkovits' grandparents noted that after the Annexation, the so-called "illegals" (former members of the clandestine Nazi party before the Anschluss) returned to Austria. These people reported on how, under Hitler, plentiful well-paid jobs were available, three weeks of vacations, and functioning welfare institutions. People didn't care that the work under Hitler was for the war-industry; all they cared for was to survive.

Mihalkovits' father, a social democrat, did not talk much about his political convictions. His mother insisted on being careful and on never saying anything unfavorably about Hitler. One of his elementary school teachers was a passionate national socialist. Every morning, students had to gather and hoist up the Swastika flag while singing the German anthem. His religion teacher, a minister from Hungary, used to ask the students when entering class "...how does the German greeting go?" to which the students responded by stretching out their arm in the Nazi salute; the teacher then replied: "...children, the catholic greeting is, praise the Lord Jesus Christ." Because the Nazis didn't like him, his teachings were ultimately shortened to one hour a week. The school was National Socialist centered, and the students were ordered to sing NS songs.

Christmas time became less of a religious event. Hitler introduced the church tax hoping that this would have many people secede from church, which did actually happen. As the war continued, and the people began to realize that they were on a path to ruin, they reentered the church out of protest. More often than not, women got a visit from two uniformed SA men, handing over a piece of paper with the words saying *...he died a hero's death for the Führer and the Fatherland...*

Mihalkovits recalls that in May, his father, who ordered to become part of the *Polenfeldzug (military campaign in Poland)*, was able to advance to Moscow. He sent back home postcards; letters were not allowed. Farmers were better off since they had animals from which to live. Those who were not farmers received food ration coupons along with a weekly ration of cod-liver oil, which they had to drink right away in front of the person handing them out.

In 1941, Mihalkovits' witnessed seeing Roma, especially the children, hurling the bricks and debris from the previously destroyed synagogue up a mountain. These bricks were used to build the foundation of the barracks. The children looked shockingly emaciated. The guard who

was giving the orders came from the nearby camp; he soon succumbed to a typhoid epidemic that broke out inside the camp and was quickly replaced by a different warden.

On one day, Mihalkovits saw many scrawny looking people digging out trenches. There were Hungarian Jews, Poles, and POWs. Also, the young people from the Hitler Jugend and the women had to work the trenches. They were told that the trenches were needed for the defense against the Russians.

The Russians were friendly to the children, giving them sweets. Russian officers moved into his aunt's house, and Mihalkovits often went there to get food. However, the adults, especially the women, feared the Russians for being an imminent threat of rape.

After the war's end, his father became a leading member of the regional social democratic party. Mihalkovits asserts that the people then were miserable and disenfranchised by the fascist state. And, after hearing about Germany's accomplishments, the people thought that everything is going to get better. He imagines that whoever read *Mein Kampf* believed everything in it. Mihalkovits states that it is a tragedy to realize that, for the longest time, the Austrian people have been consciously suppressing to talk publicly about the NS-time. Only with the appointment of the Commission of Historians by chancellor Franz Vranitzky, the Austrians concluded that Austria had committed a "Lebenslüge" (life-lie). The Commission also found that there were now proportionally more members of the NSDAP than during the "Altreich" (Old Empire). The Nazis of Ritzing or Lackenbach were not made accountable for their atrocities, on the contrary; they formed the political party Verband der Unabhängigen VdU (Freedom Party) and managed to get other Nazis to join; Bruno Kreisky recruited Friedrich Peter to become a member of the government. He was an SS officer who was known to have participated in the horrendous killings in the East.

It is no secret that during the postwar years, many politicians had a rich Nazi past. During more than one of Mihalkovits' lectures as a historian, he was asked by his students to stop talking about the plight of Jews and Roma. At times he perceived these requests as a threat.

Mihalkovits asserts that to this day, the people have not overcome the Nazi-era, the war, and its consequences. He still hears people bringing up poor excuses like "...if we just had known...." To this day, some families maintain a particular ideology that is comparable with that of the National Socialists. He cautions, though, to not make the current generation responsible for the crimes that have been committed by their ancestors.