

Interview with SELMA STEINMETZ

German

RG-50.569\*0020

Tape 1, Side A

[very poor quality recording]

In this interview conducted by Peter Wortsman, Selma Steinmetz describes her escape from Austria to France and her life in the unoccupied zone there. Furthermore, she concentrates on her duties in the resistance and analyzes the cultural, political and social life in Post-war Austria.

**001 – 084**

Family background and emigration to France

She was the daughter of a Jewish grocer; her father was a convinced Social Democrat and member of the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei; she has a degree in German philology and history; wrote her dissertation in German philology about Bettina Brentano; since it was written by a Jew, the work was rejected by university; she switched to high school pedagogy for German and history; after beginnings of *austrofascism* it was no longer possible for her to be a Jewish teacher for history and German.

She emigrated to France in 1938 with thousands of other Austrians; worked in a Parisian suburb in a home for children of Czech, German, and Austrian immigrants; she became unemployed as the home was closed in 1939; after German invasion, left Paris walking with other Austrian women; meanwhile, her boyfriend was arrested in Germany; France wanted to deport people; she did not know where to go; had relatives in the north of the US; she did not want to leave France.

**085 –**

On the run

They went to the South; first bombings in France; they went to the unoccupied zone in France; could live there as Austrians and Jews; she made wallets and worked as a secretary for the Quakers in Clermont-Ferrand; French authorities enforced conditions on refugees; armistice negotiations contained certain paragraphs against refugees ...

[rest inaudible due to the poor quality recording]

Tape 2, Side A

**000 – 060**

Her life in Austria

She returned to Austria in 1946; was very disappointed in her friends and college colleagues; heard stories about the Russian occupation, they did not ask her about her experience;

She got an assignment as a librarian in the Städtische Bibliothek in Vienna; lost the job after years of work due to political reasons; she worked as a journalist then; return in the cultural life of Austria to everything that was forbidden before; “never again fascism and never again war”;

she is retired now, politically independent, and very committed to Amnesty International and human rights organizations.

**061 – 180**

Austria after World War II

There was more and more information about the Holocaust in the media; she describes experience of the high school reunion with Jews and former Nazis; she mentions the fate of the *Mischlinge*, mixed race, who stayed in Austria and lost all their Jewish friends; she analyzes the relationship between national socialism and capitalism; she explains her conviction to return to Austria; the importance of Jewish literature for world literature; defines the “new Austria” with its new national identity; Vienna’s position in the world; the Jewish community in Vienna.

**181 – 330**

Jewish life and antisemitism in Austria today

Nonexistence of antisemitism in Austria today; she explains relationship between integration and acceptance of religious groups; she analyzes the political parties in Austria and their orientation, Zionism, and National Socialism.

[rest inaudible due to poor quality recording]

Tape 2, Side B

[seems to be side B of Tape 1]

**000 – 064**

Life in the unoccupied zone of France

Her husband was an illegal communist; they were asked to leave Toulouse to a specific residence outside of that city; she did not know how to get to her work place; went to the place secretly, and hiding from the police; in May 1942 the deportations to transit camps started; she describes hiding in a monastery organized by the Quakers, the issue of false papers, and the escape from Toulouse; she was arrested and was helped by other people.

**065 – 140**

The resistance

She describes organization and leadership of the resistance; mentions her exact duties in the “travail antiallemand” (anti-German work): the practice of distributing newsletters to soldiers based on information from foreign radio broadcasts; mass arrests by the Gestapo after they discovered the newsletters; she was tortured in a prison in Lyon; she was supposed to be sent to Auschwitz, but they were liberated ...

[ rest inaudible due to poor quality recording]