



Franz Deutsch

## **Peace Leaflets A Starting point for Dialogue**

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### COMRADESHIP

"By the grace of God I was born late." This is not an empty statement. I am very grateful that I did not have to shoot somebody I did not know, and whose mother somewhere might have cried over her son.

I pity all those who had the misfortune of being born early enough to have to swear an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler, to have to sacrifice their best years, their health, and even their lives in the pursuit of his megalomaniac ideas.

Whenever I hear the song "I Had a Good Comrade," I am deeply touched. It is easy to understand that the inferno of World War II has given rise to a sense of comradeship that transcends the war itself. It expresses itself in an annual commemoration day for the fallen. In this manner, I too feel that I am a member of the veteran's legion.

It would be hiding one's head in the sand, if one failed to admit that many Austrians, looking for a way out of their economic circumstances, followed the Swastika flag. Many of them only found out after 1945 how their idealism was betrayed. Their erroneous beliefs turned into the disillusionment of a lifetime.

Fortunately, the great majority of former National Socialism adherents did not resign themselves to passivity, but vigorously participated in the reconstruction of a free and democratic Austria. However, some former followers find it impossible to confess that they were misguided. A psychological study of human behavior might provide an answer as to why some people are incapable of admitting their failures to themselves and others.

The First Austrian Peace Museum's central aim is to search for answers to the question of "Where does it begin?" We may have one answer. An individual can readily admit that he has backed the wrong horse and he can even laugh at himself and his shortcomings. Actually, one ought to feel sorry for those who cannot admit that they have made such mistakes. Their emotional growth is stunted.

Such individuals can infect younger generations with the poison, for example, of fascism. This could start with an attempt to illustrate the faults of the scandal-ridden democracy. The simplest method is to concentrate on some political "black sheep". A grudge against wayward politicians

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can easily become a grudge against democracy itself. This becomes fertile ground for new false and dangerous doctrines of salvation.

Is man really condemned to repeat his mistakes? The torching of refugee asylums, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and the malicious mailing of letter bombs ought to provoke serious responses.