



Franz Deutsch

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

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### " THAT'S THE WAY THEY ARE "

In 1980, my wife and I set out on a trip around the world which lasted two years. After our return, I was frequently asked about the highlights of our journey. Possibly, my answers may not have been satisfactory to some, because my "highlights" were not of places and sights that are marked with 3 or 4 stars in travel guides. Rather, they were of longer stays that gave us a chance to come into closer contact with residents and to get acquainted with their customs and philosophies of life. This allowed us to compare their culture with ours. Sometimes we were even accepted in their communities.

In the spring of 1996, 23 students from the United States were on a 4-month long educational trip to Europe, during which they also visited the Peace Museum in Wolfsegg. Some of the students had selected "Peace Studies" as a course of study, which included sociology and research in conflict resolution. The main purpose of their trip was to gain insight into the European experience of peace and war. I believe it is a splendid idea to widen the scope of a study by proceeding from the classroom to places where things actually occurred. This allows one to reach conclusions based on personal experience.

The study group's program was supplemented with a visit of the Mauthausen concentration camp, Hitler's birth place in Braunau, and the Jägerstätter-House in St. Radegund. During a round of conversation at the Peace Museum, as well as on a bus trip, I had the opportunity to tell the students about lessons I had learned myself on my travels.

When visiting foreign countries, one carries quite often a bunch of prejudices in one's luggage. But it is absolutely marvellous that travelling permits one to lighten one's luggage by throwing prejudices overboard. However, this is possible only if one meets people. Encounters that are more than just a nodding acquaintance, require a longer stay, otherwise those prejudices might remain entrenched. Customs in a foreign country may seem strange, and if accompanied by an unpleasant episode, will only reinforce those negative views. In such cases, one is tempted to succumb to the old fallacy: "That's the way they are"! Or even worse: "I always knew they were like that." Thus, confirmation of one's prejudices ends in self-deception. Does it make sense to travel if we allow that to happen?

**ERSTES ÖSTERREICHISCHES FRIEDENSMUSEUM  
FIRST AUSTRIAN PEACE MUSEUM**



The visit to four concentration camps weighed heavily on the minds of the students of American study group. Shocking experiences of that kind can easily spawn a blanket judgement like: "That's the way they are—the Germans, the Austrians."

Admittedly, a number of Austrians were involved in the worst brutalities of Hitler's concentration camps, and others misused their positions of authority. But do these facts justify a blanket statement? Surely, the American students' visit to the Jägerstätter-House and their meeting with Mrs. Franziska Jägerstätter and her daughter must have persuaded them otherwise.

Dr. Erna Putz, the author of two books about Jägerstätter, gave the American students details of farmer Jägerstätter's life, his doubts, his courage and his death. Mrs. Putz later told me how pleasantly surprised foreign visitors are when they hear that a man like Jägerstätter existed. This sounds as if he had been the only one who had the courage to deny loyalty to Hitler. It sounds as if all Austrians had cheered Hitler in Vienna in 1938. They forget about those Austrians who stayed away. They forget the farewell address of chancellor Schuschnigg, when he said: "We are yielding to force – God bless Austria." Franz Mattischek of Wolfsegg was an unknown painter and a Jehovah witness. His ardent convictions made him oppose Hitler, and he was executed in Berlin in 1939. There were others like him, though they remain unrecognized.