Vienna, November 13, 1934.

No. 209.

SUBJECT: FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION OF THE JEWS IN AUSTRIA.

CONFIDENTIAL.

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my confidential despatch No. 109, of October 24, 1934, (256.1/900) in which I refer to certain aspects of the situation of the Jews in Austria and more particularly to the reassuring conversations which have recently taken place between the Austrian Chancellor and leaders of the Jewish Community in the country, and to the public statement issued by the Government which indicated that it will be its policy to see that all citizens are protected in their legal rights and opportunities.

After
After forwarding this despatch information reached me from various sources of a somewhat disquieting nature to the effect that discrimination against the Jews was continuing with the sympathetic approval of individuals highly placed in the Government and through the direct action of various departments. The information which reached me indicated that within, as well as without, Austria there were those who doubted the sincerity of the Chancellor's assurances. In view of this and because of the obvious importance within and without the country that this problem should not come to the foreground in Austria, I have within the last few weeks again gone carefully into this situation and I am now able to give the Department the following information.

The result of my inquiry is that I believe it to be unfair and unjustified by the circumstances to doubt the sincerity of the Chancellor's assurances to the leaders of the Jewish community and of the Government's communiqué referred to in my despatch No. 189. It is undoubtedly true that an anti-Semitic movement exists in Austria. It is clear that highly placed persons in the Government may be basically anti-Semitic or at least may be in sympathy with some of the discriminatory measures which have been and which, I believe, are still taking place against the Jews in the country. On the other hand, it is, I believe, equally clear that responsible members of the Government, including those who may be personally sympathetic towards discriminatory measures, realize that this problem cannot be allowed to come to the foreground and are taking definite measures to stop further discrimination. There is reason to believe that various elements in the country have been endeavoring, and are still endeavoring, to push discriminatory measures. In several public
addresses a member of the Government has within the past week indirectly referred to the necessity of "protecting the future of the Aryan youth". There are real indications that the Government has been pressed to give its support to anti-Semitic measures and the fears which have been expressed in Austria and abroad that discriminations might increase have not been entirely unfounded. On the other hand, evidence is available that the dangers of such discriminations are more fully realised in highly placed circles than before, and that the Government is taking a definite attitude against further discriminations and may ameliorate and correct some of the situations previously created.

The Department may be interested in some of the facts on which this opinion is based, and I will relate briefly a few of them.

I have discussed with the President and the Vice-president of the Jewish Kultusgemeinde of Vienna, which is the official spokesman for the Jews of Austria, the present situation of the Jews. They tell me that in their opinion there is no proper ground to doubt the sincerity of the Chancellor's assurances that he will personally endeavor to see that discriminations are stopped. As an evidence they pointed out to me that the communiqué recently issued by the Government was submitted to them before it was given to the press, as the Government wished it to be given out in a form satisfactory to them. They stated that the Chancellor's manner during their last interview was such as to leave no grounds for the belief that he was not entirely sympathetic towards their problems and understanding of the whole situation and actuated by the clear desire to prevent further discriminations. They say that too little time has elapsed since they received the Chancellor's assurances and since the communiqué
was issued to pass any definite judgment on how these assurances will actually work out in practice, but as to their sincerity they have no doubt. In expressing this opinion I venture to say that the leaders of the Jewish community have shown considerable wisdom, for in no basic and deep-seated matter as this anti-Semitic movement in Austria, as well as elsewhere, one cannot expect results quickly. Any orientation of the Government, in whichever direction it may be, must necessarily work out slowly. As the leaders of the Jewish community have stated to me, the important thing is not what happens immediately in particular cases, but what the orientation of the Government is. This orientation, they believe, is favorable for the present.

It is significant and encouraging that the President of the Jewish community in Vienna, which is to say for Austria, has been appointed a member of the Staatsrat, as already reported in my despatch No.301, of November 6, 1936. There is no provision in the Constitution or in the law which makes Jewish representation in the Staatsrat obligatory. The Staatsrat, as the Department is aware, is the highest advisory and deliberative body in the new corporative structure of the country. The Constitution merely provides that all classes of patriotic citizens shall be represented therein. I am informed that it was not the original intention of the Government to appoint a Jew to this Council, but that when it was brought to the attention of the Chancellor that it was the intent of the Constitution that all patriotic groups were to be represented therein and that it would be a distinct slight if the Jews were not given representation, he immediately agreed that a Jew should be appointed as he had not looked at it from this point of view. It is significant and encouraging that the Jew chosen should not only be an outstanding member of the Jewish community, but in fact the elected head
head of the Jewish community who therefore becomes the spokesman in the Ständerrat for the Jews.

I have referred in my despatch No. 109 to the anti-Semitic attitude of the Burgomaster of Vienna and of the influence he is said to have exerted in furthering discriminations against Jews in the hospitals and other administrations controlled by the city. This attitude has been brought to the attention of the Chancellor by the leaders of the Jewish community and I have reason to believe that various disinterested persons and friends of Austria had brought the undesirable effect of the Burgomaster's attitude to the attention of the Chancellor. The Chancellor had agreed that he would speak to the Burgomaster and bring the internal as well as the external effects of these discriminatory measures to his attention. Evidence of the Chancellor's good faith is to be seen in the fact that the Burgomaster has written a very cordial letter to Dr. Friedmann, the President of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, congratulating him on his appointment to the Ständerrat and expressing in very cordial terms his happiness that Dr. Friedmann's services to Austria have been recognized through this signal honor. I believe that the Kultusgemeinde is therefore correct in assuming that the Burgomaster would not have written this letter had not the Chancellor carried out his promise of bringing to his attention major considerations involved in the discrimination against the Jews.

A perhaps even more significant indication of the sincerity of the Chancellor is the following. The President of the bar association in Vienna is a Jew. Some time ago a group of non-Jewish lawyers, animated by anti-Semitic tendencies, formed a separate bar association to which only Christian lawyers are admitted. A group of the members of this bar association recently approached the Chancellor with the request that certain measures be carried through
through in the legal profession which were discriminatory in character. The Chancellor, to the great surprise and to the considerable consternation of the visitors, asked them what the President of the Vienna bar association thought about the matter. His visitors asked the Chancellor what a Jew had to do with a purely Christian matter. The Chancellor pointed out to them that the question on which they had approached him was not a religious or a racial matter, but a professional one, and that he had had sufficient annoyance with the matter of the parallel classes not to be interested in the question they brought to him.

I am informed by the President and the Vice President of the Jewish community in Vienna that the Chancellor has given them his definite assurance that he will personally interest himself in the parallel classes matter. He has stated definitely that it is too late to do anything during the present semester, but has given his personal assurances that if any discrimination or undesirable measures in the carrying out of the parallel classes decree are brought to his attention by the Kultusgemeinde he will himself go into these classes and give the matter his attention so that whatever action is taken shall be on the basis of the real intent of the decree and that the decree should not become a means of discrimination against the Jews. The officers of the Kultusgemeinde have expressed very real appreciation of the attitude of the Chancellor, for they say that if he will carry out his promise of actually visiting classes the parallel classes decree will not work out so as to place the Jews in a secondary position in the country.

There is a certain division among the Jews in Austria, and there are groups which are more radical than the attitude of the majority. The majority opinion of the Jews in Austria is, I believe, expressed by the Kultusgemeinde and its officers. It is the attitude of some of the members of the more radical Jewish groups which
has undoubtedly led to some of the increased anti-Semitism. By own experience with these more radical groups in Austria is that here, as elsewhere, they are for the most part entirely unappreceptive of the realities of the situation and cannot recognize or will not recognize that there is a Jewish question. For this reason it is necessary to examine carefully reports which appear abroad with respect to discrimination, for these are not always representative of the real situation. They sometimes emanate from hysterical or radical people or at times come from those who speak for a very small group and are in no sense representative of the majority of Jewish opinion. Sometimes they are merely based on inadequate information.

I have, for example, recently seen the cables of the Vienna representative of the Jewish Telegraph Agency of New York sent to his syndicate with reference to the appointments to corporate bodies made on November 1. In this cablegram he gave the impression that the Jews of Austria were very much disturbed over the lack of recognition given then in these appointments. As a matter of fact, the officers of the Kultusgemeinde who speak for the majority of the Jews informed me that the Jewish community is on the whole well satisfied with the attitude of the Government and with the recognition they had received in connection with these appointments. They say that it is true that the Jews were not given representation in an adequate manner on the Economic Council when one considers the large number of Jews in business and finance in Austria, but they point out that this was largely due to their own lack of initiative. These appointments were made on the basis of lists presented to the Government by interested organizations and groups. The Jewish community and the Jewish industrialists and businessmen did not present any list of candidates to the Government. They felt, I am told,
that under the circumstances it would be inadvisable for them to
do so and that their interests might be best represented under existing
circumstances in these Councils by Christians whom they felt they
could trust. The officers of the Kultusgemeinde are of the opinion
that it was a mistake of the Jews not to present lists and that the
attitude of the Jewish industrialists and merchants, although well
meant, was not the proper one. On the other hand, they state that
no criticism could be attached to the Government for not appointing
Jews to the Economic Council when no names of Jews were submitted
to them.

I happen to know that the representative of the Jewish
Telegraph Agency here, although a very worthy and good man, has not
heretofore been in as close touch with the Kultusgemeinde regarding
such matters as he should be. He also appears to be one of those
Jews who has an inadequate appreciation of the wide implications of
this problem and is inclined to be narrow and to represent more radical
Jewish opinion. In this particular instance his telegram to
his agency did not clearly represent responsible and the majority of
Jewish opinion in Austria, and this, of course, is very important
as the Jewish Telegraph Agency serves many Jewish newspapers not only
in the United States, but in other countries. I would like to say,
however, that this reference is not made as an indication of the
general unreliability of this correspondent, but rather to indicate
that some of Jewish discriminations may not always be a definite indica-
tion of the facts. There is sufficient discrimination of this
character so that no exaggeration is necessary, and certainly no mis-
representation of specific circumstances is desirable or helpful.
I have reason to believe that this correspondent will in the future
keep in touch with more conservative and more representative Jewish
opinion in Austria, as it is particularly important under existing
Circumstances.
circumstances that the attitude of the Austrian Government on this problem should be correctly reported.

There has been an increasing tendency in certain circles to emphasize anti-Semitism and that there was a danger that anti-Semitic measures might increase is indicated by the fact that Cardinal Innitzer, as the head of the Catholic Church in Austria, in a recent public address made it clear that the Catholic Church in Austria does not approve of anti-Semitic measures. Articles have recently appeared in various Catholic journals indicating that the Church has no sympathy with and will not support anti-Semitic measures.

On the other hand, there recently appeared in a Catholic publication known as "Die Erfülung" an article by a Jesuit Father who is quite widely known, in which he indicated that the Catholic Church must oppose all discriminatory measures against the Jews, but in which he indicates that there should be renewed efforts towards converting the Jews to Christianity. The publication of this article in Austria at this time cannot be considered as a wise or desirable step, for it tends to bring the Jewish question to the fore-ground and particularly a question which is objectionable to most Jews—that of conversion. At a recent meeting of Jews in Vienna the leaders of the Jewish community found it necessary to refer to this article and to protest against the solution of the Jewish problem being found in an endeavor to convert the Jews to another faith.

The conversations of the so-called National groups with the Chancellor, which have been referred to in despatches of this Legation, have undoubtedly had some influence in strengthening anti-Semitic activities. Of the persons participating in these conversations, with the exception of one, all have in their conversations with the Chancellor and in their public statements indicated that
they are not anti-Semitic in their attitude and do not sympathize with the anti-Semitic action in Germany. There is a question, however, as to how much faith can be placed in these protestations. They may in certain cases be expressions of personal conviction, but it is quite clear, and I think is appreciated by all persons who look the situation in the face, that should these groups acquire any influence in the Austrian Government there would be a very real increase in anti-Semitism in the country. That this is so, I think is thoroughly realized in all circles in the Government. There is no indication for the present that the conversations with so-called National groups will lead to any definite agreement or arrangement. The very fact, however, that the conversations have taken place has increased anti-Semitic activities from certain quarters.

As of particular interest in this connection the Department will be interested to know that Mr. James McDonald, the High Commissioner for the League of Nations for the Jewish emigrants, has been in Vienna for a brief visit and requested an opportunity to see the Foreign Minister. I arranged for this interview with some difficulty as Mr. McDonald did not arrive until the day before the Foreign Minister's departure for Rome which also happened to be his reception day for the diplomatic corps. It was therefore not possible to arrange for a separate interview, but the Foreign Minister said that I could bring Mr. McDonald with me to the reception. I was therefore present during his brief interview with the Foreign Minister in which Mr. McDonald expressed the hope that anti-Semitic measures in Austria might not lead to a problem similar to that which had arisen in Germany. The Foreign Minister in very categorical terms informed Mr. McDonald that the Austrian Government was determined that the Jewish question should not become a problem. He said it was an Austrian problem which Austria will solve and it
will not become an international one. He said that the Austrian Government had taken, and is taking, care of the Jewish situation by combating Hitlerism which would not prevail in Austria and that therefore there would be no question of Austrian emigration. He emphasized the determination of the Austrian Government to control and to stop discriminations and to give to Austrian Jews equal rights and opportunities. He was very categorical in his statements.

I believe that for the present the assurances of the Government must be accepted as sincere and well meant. They have been supported in recent weeks by known and definite action as brought out in this despatch. The final outcome, however, can only be judged by future developments. That there is anti-Semitic pressure on the Government is certain. That it is resisting this pressure definitely at present is equally certain. The increase in discrimination for the present is not likely. How far the effects of discriminatory measures already taken against individuals will be alleviated is not yet clear, but I have the conviction that an endeavor will be made to clear up many of these cases. The important thing is that the anti-Semitism remains under control and that the Government is definitely committed to keeping it under control.

The Legation is following the matter with interest and will not fail to report anything of interest to the Department. That the question has an important bearing on the political situation in Austria, as well as in Europe, is clear, for the international support which the Government is receiving in so many ways would be considerably weakened if discriminatory measures should increase or not be kept under control.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.