

Chancellor stressed importance of show “Children of Maison d’Izieu”

Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann is of the opinion that “tolerance“ is a number one priority (not only) in 2010. Under his aegis and at his express wish, the photo exhibition “Children of Maison d’Izieu“ (see also “News from Austria“ No. 24/09) is presented in numerous Austrian vocational schools until the end of 2010. The children’s home founded by Sabine and Miron Zlatin in Izieu, a small town in the south of France (80 km from Lyon), accommodated more than 100 Jewish children holding different citizenships. Their parents had been deported by the Nazis between May 1943 and April 1944. On 6 April 1944, 44 children, including seven from Vienna, and their caretakers were arrested and deported on the orders of Klaus Barbie, the head of Gestapo of Lyon. Only one of the persons present managed to escape. 42 children and five adults were murdered in the gas chambers of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. Two young people and the director of the children’s home were shot death in Reval (Estonia). Only caretaker Lea Feldblum survived deportation.

On 27 January 2010 the photo show “The Children of Maison d’Izieu“ – conceived as a touring exhibition – was opened at Campus Längenfeld (Vienna-Meidling Adult Education Centre [VHS] and Hans Mandl Vocational School). The photos shows cheerful children with caretakers looking rather worriedly, touching children’s drawings and letters to the parents. After an introductory piece performed by violinist Aliosha Biz, VHS Director Gerhard Bisovsky stated that political education – alongside with vocational training – was crucial for integration into the adult world.

Israeli Ambassador to Austria Aviv Shir-On said that millions of people could have been saved if Israel had been founded already in 1938. During the Holocaust, 1.5 million children were murdered. The cruel fate of the children of Maison d’Izieu was a warning that something like this must never happen again. French Ambassador Philippe Carré argued along a similar vein. He addressed collaboration of the Vichy regime with the Nazis and explained the difficult political situation of France as the country was divided in a northern zone occupied by the Germans and a southern zone which was to remain “independent“ until 1942. In 1943 the Germans invaded the south east of France occupied by the Italians. Carré highlighted that in April 1994 former French President François Mitterrand had declared Maison d’Izieu a memorial site and inaugurated it as one of his “Grands Travaux“. His “large construction sites“ of a political-cultural type include the Louvre pyramid and the War Museum in Caen. Mitterrand then stated: “The children of Izieu are the symbol of all Jews of France who were exterminated under the Vichy regime“. Since its foundation as the first memorial site in France, Maison d’Izieu has explicitly focused on the fate of hidden and deported Jewish children.

The most remarkable keynote speaker was Beate Klarsfeld. Together with her husband Serge, she hunted Klaus Barbie for many years, who had hidden in Bolivia. Taken to court in 1987, he was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment and died in the prison of Lyon in 1991. The last speaker, Secretary of State for the Media Josef Ostermayer, focused attention on the invaluable work of Viennese exhibition-maker Milli Segal.

More than two years ago, she had asked then Minister of Transport Werner Faymann for his support for the bronze sculpture “For the Child” created by British sculptor Flor Kent. It was erected in the entrance hall of Vienna’s western train station in March 2008. The work of art – showing a boy sitting on a suitcase – is dedicated to the children saved from the NS dictatorship and to their rescuers. Ostermayer explained that Faymann supported the important work of Segal to the present day. More could be achieved by turning the spotlight on individual tragedies than by mentioning the huge, but rather abstract numbers of victims. As a pupil Ostermayer had listened to a lecture by Rosa Jochmann about her long detention in a concentration camp, making an indelible impression on him. It was also clear to him that unemployment was a breeding ground for intolerance and that it was vital to fight for social security in a crisis. Demagogy was unacceptable. In this context, Ostermayer also demanded “consequences“ for the Third Speaker of Parliament Martin Graf, who had insulted Ariel Muzicant. He thanked Beate Klarsfeld for her commitment. By way of conclusion, Andrea Pauli of Vienna’s 1st Reading Theatre (1. Wiener Lesetheater) read a moving letter of György Halpern to his mummy from Izieu. He was gassed aged 8 years. His parents searched for him for the rest of their lives and died in Haifa from a broken heart. Aliosha Biz performed the piece “Oifn Pripetchik“ (“At the fireplace“), filled with family memories of Kraków.
www.millisegal.at

1. 02. 2010