

# REVIEWS

## Autobiography of an Austrian refugee who fought back

EMIGRATION INS LEBEN: WIEN – LONDON UND NICHT MEHR RETOUR

by Eric Sanders

edited by Peter Pirker

Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2008, 376 pp. hardcover, 24.80 euros

The story of how thousands of young Austrian and German refugees fought for the Allies during the Second World War has been well documented in Helen Fry's excellent book *The King's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*. One of those mentioned in that book is Eric Sanders and in this new autobiography he relates his story from childhood in Vienna, via his wartime adventures, to his new, post-war life in London.

Eric Sanders, or Erich Schwarz as he was then, was born in Vienna at the end of 1919. In the early part of the book he describes his life as a Jewish child, growing up in a relatively poor area in Vienna and later in St Veit. As well as displaying an early interest in music he was active in Zirenu, a Jewish youth organisation. The many anecdotes of that period indicate a happy childhood, in spite of experiencing antisemitism in school well before the Anschluss. With excerpts from his daily diary the author describes the difficulties and bureaucracy involved in trying to get out of Austria after March 1938, but he and his parents were relatively lucky as eventually all were able to find refuge in England.

When war broke out, Eric was keen to help in the fight against the Nazis but, like most other refugees, this initially involved being in the unarmed Aliens' Companies of the Pioneer Corps. This did, however, give him the first taste of war as he was sent to France in 1940, before having to be evacuated after its fall. With many amusing and wry memories, he describes his efforts and eventual success in being transferred to the Special Operations Executive (SOE) for work behind enemy lines. His training included parachute jumping and radio communications but, although by 1945 he was in northern Italy awaiting action, this never actually materialised. After the war he became an interpreter for the British Army Legal Unit in Austria and used his time there to become involved in the redevelopment of the Social Democratic Party.

After returning to England, he qualified as a teacher and describes his experiences of teaching in comprehensive schools. Following early retirement, he started a new career including writing plays and even scripting a film about Nasser. He retained his interest in politics and was active in the work of the Labour Party, including trying to encourage it to support the Austrian

Social Democrats.

Peter Pirker provides a foreword and an informative 17-page postscript to the book. One part of the latter covers the work of the SOE in Austria towards the end of the war, which sadly involved the loss of several of Eric's colleagues. He also discusses postwar political developments in the country.

The book is a fascinating story not only of one individual's life but also of the dedication of many young Austrians in fighting back against their oppressors. My only regret is that the book is in German – I hope a translation will follow.

**George Vulkan**