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## **Germany**

### **Pessimistic?**

Many readers will think the following reports unduly pessimistic. And they would be right if the suggestion were made that the conclusions to which they lead are to be taken as being applicable to the general situation in Germany in all its aspects. But that is a suggestion which we are far from making. The experiences recorded here are precisely those which the persons from whom they have been received might be expected to meet with in the particular place and circumstances. Since we are anxious to avoid giving a too rosy picture to our readers we add these less encouraging reports to those already presented. We must be content to learn from them yet again the old lesson that we cannot be too cautious in drawing conclusions about the situation in the Third Reich; true as they might be of the place and circumstances from which they are drawn, to generalise from them would be dangerous.

### **Springtime Anxiety in Germany**

In my letter of May 25th, 1942 considerable extracts from the "Reichs-Dienst Fuehrungsbericht S.S." were reproduced. They showed very clearly what Himmler's **[1]** agents think of the situation on the home front, and the present reports reveal that they are not the only people who consider the position critical and dangerous. They also show quite unmistakably that the enormous sacrifices caused by the war, together with the Gestapo's intensified terror, have produced in many Germans a predominant feeling of fear and anxiety.

### **Workers**

Cases of men doing their utmost to escape enlistment in the armed forces are extremely common. One of the reports says: "In several large armaments factories where I was able to observe conditions closely, I found the workers absorbed in the problem of finding ways and means of escaping the so-called commissions of death which from time to time conduct a comb-out in the factories to free men for service on the Eastern Front. These efforts by the workers to remain in the deferred and reserved classes are openly admitted by themselves. And nobody finds such conduct strange - it is an ambition obviously shared by all. It is even quite openly discussed which military unit is most likely to have the fewest casualties, if one cannot get out of having to join the army altogether."

### **Depression**

"When military events and political matters are mentioned in conversation in the factories and on the building-sites, it is without comment. Opinions are never stated, favourable or unfavourable. A few months ago this was not so. At that time discussions

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took place and opinions, even those that were actually expressed, were divided. But to-day the workers prefer to keep silence where a few months ago the pros and cons of a long war, for instance, would have been debated. For everybody feels hanging over him the shadow of compulsory enlistment. This anxiety has only been made the greater by the enormous losses on the Eastern Front and by the sight of all the wounded and crippled in the streets; all this has produced a deep depression in many circles."

## **Women**

The women of course do not need to fear being called up. That partly explains why they show greater readiness than the men to criticise the regime. A very well-informed correspondent writes:

"The women, on the other hand, are much more courageous than the men in criticising the regime. And they do it in the workshops as well as at home. Even in the canteens they express themselves trenchantly enough. It very often happens that in mixed discussions they reproach the men for having no courage, or at any rate not sufficient, in their attitude to public affairs, and for failing to express in public what they have already said at home. There is nothing to be gained by keeping one's mouth shut for ever."

## **Silent Resistance**

But it can be said that the workers do help themselves by signifying their discontent in other ways than by actual expressing it. One of our correspondents writes: "The workers do tend to put up a certain kind of resistance in their working life. Many who have been forced into trades for which they are not suited or which are badly paid, do not do their work with the care it requires. To remonstrances addressed to them by the manager or foreman they coolly reply that they didn't ask for this kind of work and it's not their trade anyway."

## **The Middle Classes**

"Men who used to work their own little farm or have a little business of their own and who have now been hounded into the armaments industry speak their minds quite openly about what they call this 'degradation' and 'proletarianisation' which is precisely what they had hoped to escape when they gave their support to Hitler. - These people feel disappointed and put upon, and they openly say so. But in the factory personnel they are still a little class by themselves in whose troubles the ordinary worker even takes a malicious pleasure, it being his opinion that they are only reaping the consequences of their former toadying to the Nazis."

## **Demoralisation**

Another correspondent writes:

"But even amongst the workers themselves the pressure and isolation to which they

have been subjected for years, together with the new wave of anxiety, have had some pernicious effects. Since the Trade Unions have for many years discontinued their educational

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work and since the German 'Labour Front' naturally does everything in its power to support every tendency towards demoralisation, it is not to be wondered at that here and there demoralisation does set in. This tendency is all the greater because in many of the newly erected factories in the armaments industry there is a very mixed personnel, the individual members of which have no trade union traditions behind them or feelings of loyalty to each other based on long association. Hence the unlovely and all too frequent spectacle of the worker 'sucking up' to the boss; a man will frequently do his best to impress the foreman with his ability compared to that of the other workmen; in the struggle for better jobs he will have no regard whatsoever for the interests of his fellows."

### **The "Cadres"**

"The old socialists and free trade unionists have of course remained untouched by developments such as these. Many of them are in prison, their arrest in a great many cases being obviously a precautionary measure to prevent them from influencing the factory workers or even their old friends, especially in times like these when difficulties are more or less unpredictable. The renewed wave of terror and intimidation has caused some at least of those who had retained their liberty to retire into the background, so as not to make themselves too conspicuous in this 'spring-time of fear', - as they themselves call it."

### **Air-Raids**

"The casualty figures announced to the public after air-raids on Germany are called by every worker 'a pack of lies as usual, of course'. But generally speaking the raids are now being faced with rather more equanimity. There is no doubt, however, that it would be difficult to overestimate the effect of the sustained bombing of German towns in its devastating effect upon the morale of the people. It is true that they are becoming hardened to it; but there is ample confirmation for the statement that the population of frequently bombed towns are inclined to outbreaks of despair."

### **No Help for the N.S.D.A.P.**

"Fuel for these outbreaks of despair is provided by the wide-spread belief that the German towns are going to suffer as much as the English ones have done. This opinion is not accompanied by any feeling of hatred towards the English; on the contrary, there is a vague feeling that Germany is only being paid in her own coin. The Nazis are unable to make any capital for themselves out of the bombing of German towns by the English. The great mass of the people do not respond to-day to the efforts of the party to whip up enthusiasm for the Nazis. The exceptions become fewer and fewer as time goes on."

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### **Propaganda**

"A good deal of credence is given to the lies circulated by the Nazis about the food

situation in England which they say is much worse than that of Germany. These lies help considerably in making the wretched food situation in Germany appear a little more bearable. If English propaganda would in a convincing manner and as frequently as possible broadcast the truth about the food situation in England, it would be of material help to the opposition within the Reich."

## **Duration of the War**

Opinion is divided on the question whether Germany will hold out until final victory. Even the younger soldiers now enter more frequently into discussions of this sort. There are not very many who expect victory to come this year. Optimistic opinions may be expressed when they are with members of the civilian population, but amongst themselves the soldiers are more honest, that is to say they voice their doubts. The only thing that has an encouraging effect is the success of the Japanese. Another tonic is the belief, current among many that 'a miracle will come to the aid of the Fuehrer'."

## **Casualties at the Front**

"An officer serving at the front gave it as his opinion and that of other officers that Germany is losing too many of her best men. The occupied countries are keeping their best age groups intact and one day they will be fighting against us. We will simply be obliged, before this year is out, to mobilise the whole of Europe, and even to send the troops of other countries into the very front line."

## **Medical Facilities in Germany**

"A woman suffering from a gastric ulcer and in a very critical state tried to get into a hospital. As all the hospitals were full the doctor sent her home with no better relief than some instructions about her diet. It happened that the woman heard about a definite and very effective cure for her disease. The doctor agreed about its efficacy, but told her that it had to be obtained from abroad, and Germany was unable to place credits abroad for such things in these days."

## **Cripples**

A report about the wounded in Germany emphasises the large number of cripples to be seen in the streets and how depressing it is to see them. A young mother wrote to us from Germany that her little boy had forgotten how to walk properly because he is constantly imitating the war-wounded.

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## **From Vienna**

We learn from a longish report that the inhabitants of Vienna at the beginning of April were of the opinion that the city had been bombed by flying fortresses. We have no means at the moment of ascertaining whether an attack was really carried out against Vienna, but we consider it possible that the explosions were due to something other than an air-raid and that the imagination of the population supplied the presence of allied planes. The fact is, however, that the people of Vienna got very excited and spoke their minds in no uncertain terms about Hitler. The report goes on to say that in many factories acts of sabotage are on the increase and that even the Gestapo men disguised as workers who were put into the factories have failed to make any appreciable

difference. Everybody looks forward with dread to next winter.

## Opposition from the Generals

One report dated at the end of March gives the following information about the crises involving high army officers. "Most of the staff officers who had been relieved of their commands or even arrested have now been reinstated. About 200 staff officers are still under arrest. It is generally thought that this opposition on the part of the generals has been silenced for some time to come. It is true that the conspiracy still goes on amongst the officers and with a good deal more circumspection than before; they learnt their lesson in the recent clashes with the S.S. But all the information at present available suggests that the plotting of these rebel officers will remain without any decisive effect. They were ruthlessly treated; several adjutants among the arrested officers were killed under mysterious circumstances at the front; others just disappeared. Patient attempts were made to convert many of those who had been arrested. They were shown a large number of memoranda compiled by Hitler which were alleged to demonstrate the genius with which he had foreseen everything and how right he had been and how wrong the generals. Moreover, the prisoners were regularly visited by high officials of the S.S. who attempted by long discussion to convince them of the futility of their opposition."

(W. G. Eichler)

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## *Editorische Anmerkungen*

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1 - *Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), NS-Politiker, Reichsführer SS (1929-1945), Chef der deutschen Polizei (1936-1945), Staatssekretär im Reichsinnenministerium (1936-1943), „Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums“ (1939-1945), Reichsinnenminister (1943-1945), Befehlshaber des Heimateeres (1944-1945), federführende Beteiligung an der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft und gemeinsam mit Heydrich entscheidender Organisator des Holocaust, Selbstmord (1945).*