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## **Germany**

### **Discussions with German Deserters.**

Friends of ours living in a neutral country had an opportunity of talking to a number of German soldiers who had recently deserted from the German army. The following is a report of these discussions.

#### **Age and Class**

"The average age of the soldiers we interviewed was 24 years; there was, however, a 42 year old worker amongst them. Not one of them was an intellectual, they all belonged to the working class.

#### **Reasons for Desertion**

The one reason for desertion they had all in common was the fear of being sent again to the Eastern Front. They were terrified both of the Russian winter and the Russian fighting methods. All of them were absolutely convinced that it was senseless and hopeless for the Germans to continue the war.

Two of the deserters had also other reasons for deserting. The 42 year old worker had received the news that his home was hit during an air-raid and that his wife, his children and his parents were killed. This man told us that when he got this news, a change came over him which he could not explain. But he had one definite feeling: 'I am through with the war.' He took a bicycle which belonged to the military authorities and cycled away without any plan and without taking any precautions. Nobody stopped him and he arrived in the neutral country as if in a trance.

The other one had been seriously wounded. His retreating unit did not bother about him, although, in his opinion, they would have had the time and the possibility of carrying him away. It thus happened that while he was lying wounded he was run over by a vehicle and his back was badly injured. Through this wound he was forced to lie in the mud for another three days. When the Germans made a new advance they found him and took him to a field hospital. During these three days he had made up his mind not to return to the front where his fellow-soldiers behaved in such an uncomradely manner."

In the course of the discussions the soldiers talked about the situation inside the German army, about the comradeship there, about the political conceptions of the soldiers and about their attitude to Nazism and 'Bolshevism'. This is a report on their views:

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## **The situation inside the German army**

### **Comradeship**

"The comradeship inside the German army was on the whole bad. The main reason being that everyone suspected the other fellow of being a Gestapo spy and therefore did not dare to speak openly. The relationship between the old officers and the men was the traditional bad one because these officers had not learnt to adopt the right attitude to the common soldiers. This was different, however, in so far as young officers trained in the Nazi schools proper were concerned. Their relationship to the soldiers was good.

The relationship between the ordinary soldiers and the Waffen S.S. was very bad. The Waffen S.S. considered themselves as something special. The tremendous casualties which these units suffered - the Waffen S.S. was sent again and again in the firing line during specially heavy operations - were regarded by most soldiers with undisguised satisfaction.

### **Political Conception**

With most of these deserters the Nazi ideology had penetrated only skin-deep and their experiences during this war had completely destroyed it. They had, however, no definite political aims and no clear conception about what should follow the Hitler regime. They wanted to be able to work in peace in a new Germany and to live and speak as they considered right. It was interesting to note how in their minds the Weimar Republic was mainly associated with enormous and constantly rising unemployment, a state of affairs which was ended by the Nazis. To have given work to all was in their opinion the main asset of the Nazi regime.

They all wanted the overthrow of the Nazi regime which had disappointed them; but apart from that these 24 year old men were completely helpless. When Hitler came into power they were boys of 10 and 12 and thus never had an opportunity to acquire real political experience. After they had realised the emptiness and fallacy of Nazism they were left with a terrible intellectual and spiritual vacuum.

### **Bolshevism**

After their experiences in Russia most of them were opposed to what they called Bolshevism. Many of them said: 'Never should a regime like that be allowed to establish itself in Germany!' They told us about a German Communist whom the Nazis had taken out of a factory and sent to the front as a punishment. As they were marching through the Baltic countries he contrasted the poverty-stricken villages in the Baltic countries with the marvellous villages in Russia, and told them about the excellent Russian roads and all the other great achievements of the Soviet Union. As they marched on in Russia the roads and the villages became poorer and poorer. The communist became more and more reticent, then changed his opinion and in the end became an ardent Nazi.

### **Anglo-Saxons**

In many cases dislike of the British and Americans even surpassed their opposition to the Bolsheviks. Many of them thought that the Russians would do no harm to the common people, to the ordinary soldiers and workers. On the other hand they were afraid that the British and Americans would requisition the German factories and would make the German workers slave for them; they were afraid that the Anglo-Saxons would establish

a system of intensified capitalist exploitation at the expense of the working masses. The main argument they used in support of this view was the starvation in liberated Italy.

## **Propaganda**

All these views clearly revealed to what an extent propaganda had confused the people. The most recent feature of Goebbels' propaganda made 'Americanism' the greatest of all evils. The deserters thought that a leaflet containing an order of the day by Stalin which was circulated at the front provided evidence of the more friendly intentions on the part of Stalin. The deserters commenting on this order said that Stalin appealed to the Russian soldiers to drive the invaders from Russian soil and to throw them back across the frontier. There was no threat of retaliation and of pursuit beyond the frontiers. We were deeply impressed by this attitude of Stalin's. - Naturally they had not read Stalin's recent Orders of the Day.

## **Antisemitism**

None of the deserters made any antisemitic remarks. This problem did not seem to interest them at all. We had not the impression that they were just disguising their feelings in order not to have difficulties in the camp. We had an opportunity of unconspicuously testing their real state of mind. From the different camps - camps for deserters and civilian and military internees - a number of people were sent to a common training course for camp cooks. There were also Jews amongst the trainees. There was never the slightest friction between the various trainees. They played ping-pong together, offered cigarettes to each other and had altogether quite a natural human relationship to one another.

## **Ignorance**

The ignorance of the soldiers at the front was quite amazing and no Allied propaganda had taken this fact sufficiently into account. They knew nothing about the slaughtering of the Jews and the deportation of foreign workers. They were disgusted when they got irrefutable evidence of these Nazi crimes. They were immediately prepared to punish the Nazis for the disgrace they had brought over the German nation. They were not at all in agreement with the occupation of Russia and the other countries and thought that the resistance movements in these countries were quite justified."

## **Italy**

The following is a statement issued by the Italian Action party which once again shows the exceptional care and thought they give to all their political work.

### **"Towards the Rebirth of Italy.**

This statement is issued by the Action party. It is not however intended to be a party statement but a serious, objective and outspoken analysis of the political situation in Italy, of the problems which present themselves to every party and in which way they should be solved.

It is common knowledge that both before and after the Fascist seizure of power the

struggle between fascism and its opponents did not concern the mass of the Italian people but only some of the parties and any number of professional politicians and was more the expression of an exaggerated political

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activity than of any fundamental conflict within the life of the nation.

The Italian people are now reaping the fruits of this fatal error in the complete destruction of the national state.

Our assertion that the events which took place between the 28th October, 1922 and the 8th September, 1943 brought in their train the destruction of Italy as the great country of the Risorgimento will not be considered as an exaggeration by those who study this period honestly and objectively. But this destruction was not caused by an attack of an external power, after a courageous and heroic fight against an aggressor, no, this destruction was brought about through the unbridled interplay of irresponsible internal forces of oppression and charlatanism.

When a state has been destroyed a new one must be built up, but without including the remnants of the old; if a centre of national life is no longer in existence such a centre must be newly created; if there is to be a renaissance of Italy there must be a guarantee that it is of a permanent nature and that the irresponsibility and charlatanism of the past must be completely wiped away. Otherwise there will arise no spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle for liberation, no desire to build up anew or enthusiasm for such reconstruction, but instead the Italian people will sink once more into their old apathy and indifference. They will retain their conviction that the world is just the same as it always was; that political gangsters establish themselves in the midst of a country in ruins, that one tyranny takes the place of another, one deception follows on the other, dictatorship follows on sham democracies and the imperialism of the feudal lords is followed by that of men of lower stature.

The decision to revise the political life of the past must be clear and definite. Every aspect of the life of the individual and the community, all people, institutions and customs that are tied up with the past must undergo a change. This change must take place in everyone from the most highly placed to the humblest person. The poor Carabinieri while loyally adhering to a tradition was disarmed and presents a pitiful figure; the poor Carabinieri who as a fugitive and as a victim of oppression sees the whole world collapsing around him, must draw the consequences from his tragic fate and must revise his political ideas about the State. There is no longer any tradition or oath to bind him. There only remains his country to which he must devote himself, his country under the changed conditions in which the new national life will be created. And the officer, who is still burning under the shame of the experiences of September 8th must realise what is at the root of the crisis in his ideas on his professional honour and must seek in a new world, new both in its technical and moral basis, to harmonise the rights of the individual with rights of the community. The position is similar for the higher and lower civil servants, for the workers and industrialists, for the peasants and the agricultural workers, for the religious minded and the freethinkers, for everyone who has been affected by this tremendous national misfortune.

If such a strict examination of the exigencies of the present national emergency is undertaken by each and all, then the political condemnation of the Monarchy and Badoglio which comes from many parties, will no longer have the appearance of

a special demand or a narrow party-political creed. The responsibility of the Monarchy and Badoglio not as individuals but as representatives of institutions need not be proved here. It is not sufficient for the Italian people to get rid of Mussolini and Fascism. They must examine those institutions and forces who for hundreds of years have had the responsibility for securing the freedom, stability, and moral continuity of national life and who just because they possessed a high degree of political and social power bear an equally great responsibility for existing conditions. These institutions and power groups have failed to fulfil their obligations and must be relentlessly brought to book.

If no such retribution takes place then everything would be possible in Italy in the future; every corruption, every change of policy would be allowed, even the return to Fascism.

Behind Badoglio and the Monarchy stands the whole of the old ruling class, with all its short-sightedness, tyranny, egoism, political incompetence, reactionary spirit and charlatanism, who have ruled Italy for twenty years and have brought her to the brink of ruin.

Democracy is not yet achieved by the Monarchy and Badoglio inviting the parties to partake in the government. This concession is only made under the moral pressure of the Allies.

The denunciation of the technical incompetence and moral debasement which has brought a great country to ruin is no propaganda slogan or low political intrigue, it is a simple analysis of the obligations of every citizen; such a declaration is no longer in the realm of party politics but is of general political significance in moments of great crisis and exercises a decisive influence in establishing the moral foundation of the new State. For the sake of Italy, all Italians - even those who are greatly attached to traditional ideas - should be ready to show this civil courage and should examine their own conscience making clear to themselves their own responsibility and that of others and not vegetate in political indifference as in the past.

If the Carabinieri does not feel the obligation to defend the new Italy which the people have built up, but rather to defend the King and that Italy to which he has for so long been attached; if the officer does not feel that the Badoglio regime and its generals, the Roattis [1] and Guzzonis [2], are gone for ever and that a new army not consisting of eight million bayonets but of several hundred thousand Italian soldiers of a high professional and moral quality is in the making; if high and low officials, industrialists and workers, peasants and politicians, in fact everybody in their own sphere does not feel that everything is being built up on the basis of a new spirit and a new morality - then it will mean that Italy is still fascist, that the spirit of slavery is deeply embedded and that there is no hope for Italy.

The Monarchy and Badoglio confront the Italian people not only with political and moral problems concerning home policy - the dignity of the Italian nation in the eyes of the world is also at stake. As long as Badoglio and the Monarchy camp is presented as an act of diplomacy, instigated by the Monarchy on the eve of defeat, and not as a moral insurrection of the people, Italy's international position will be highly

unsatisfactory. Do not let us be deceived by the fact that the Allies have recognised -

although with humiliating qualifications - the regime of Badoglio and the King.

The Italian people cannot and should not accept this position. Italy has gone through 20 years of Fascism and her noblest sons have sacrificed life and freedom to shake off the fascist yoke, they have fought and have suffered prison and exile while the world at large was full of idle and ignorant spectators. In recent times it was again the common people who sabotaged the Fascist war and doomed it to failure - the same people who helped prisoners, who dodged the labour service, who supported the guerrillas and boycotted the Nazi invaders.

Maybe the Allies want Badoglio and the King to stay in power - but after all it is not the duty of the Allies to strive towards the best political solution for a former enemy country, but if we Italians accept this regime we seriously lower our national dignity.

This confronts us with the problem of the spiritual unity of the nation. Thousands of Italians mourn the death of their dear ones; these people will never understand the sense of these sacrifices, if the same men and the same institutions who have demanded sacrifices for the fight against the Allies now propagate the necessity of making the same sacrifices for fighting on their side.

The Action Party is dealing now with the problem of the Constitution because no new solutions can be successfully tackled if we do not now make a serious and sincere start. In putting the problem so drastically the Action Party does not insist upon an immediate and final decision now, such as a plebiscite or the proclamation of the Republic while the war against the Nazis is still in progress.

The Action Party demands together with other parties that a government which is really representative of the will of the people takes over all the power in the State, conducts the war against the Nazis and then calls upon the people to decide. The Action Party demands that the Monarchy should abstain from exercising political power until the decision of the people has been made and that the King should not impede the fighting spirit and the will to unity which animates all Italians. The Action Party regards the Committee of National Liberation as the common instrument of all the parties which have fought Fascism and the only authority which can form a popular government until a constituent assembly can be called."

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## *Editorische Anmerkungen*

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1 - Roatti, nach „Europe Speaks“ italienischer General unter dem Badoglio Regime.  
Weitere biographische Daten konnten nicht ermittelt werden.

2 - Alfredo Guzzoni (geb. 1877), italienischer General, Unterstaatssekretär (1940-1941),  
Kommandeur der 6. Armee Italiens.