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Germany

We are glad to be able to publish authentic eye-witness reports on the situation in Hitler's Reich. Like this report, the following ones will deal in the main with this subject.

Conversations with Travelling Companions October 1944

The passengers in the railway compartment were an elderly gentleman, two women between thirty and forty, a girl of about twenty, a boy of twelve and our correspondent.

Enough

"One woman came from Saarbrücken where she had visited her husband; she told us that her eighteen year old son had been at Brest. Out of his whole company only fifteen had returned. `He is eighteen, just a boy. Should he not really be with his mother? Is it not terrible what these children have to go through to-day? My husband saw him in Strasbourg, he says that he looks like an old man. They now want to call up my daughter; but that does not come in question. It is enough that they have my husband and my son.'

'Terrorists'

This woman then spoke about the terrible collapse in France and about the terrorists. The middle-aged man then asked: `My dear madam, will you tell me what you mean by terrorists?' This question completely nonplussed the woman. She mumbled something which obviously came from the Goebbels press. The man continued:

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'Imagine for a moment that what happened in France in 1940 had happened in Germany; that Germany was occupied and that our men behaved like these Frenchmen whom you called terrorists. What would you call them? ... Fighters for freedom, eh?' We were all in agreement.

Children on War Work

The boy came from a place on the Swiss frontier to which he had been evacuated some months earlier. He told us that everybody there had to help in digging trenches, including the Hitler Youth. The officers ordered them about all the time. He thought they should have done the digging and not the children.

Foreign Workers

All of them brought instances of the fact that the British and Americans were

excellently informed and always bombed important factories. They added that this was not amazing, considering how many foreigners there were in Germany. The other woman remarked if she had anything to do with it these foreigners would be sent away at once, as in case of collapse they would be a danger to the whole population.

Reparations

There was agreement that the war was lost and that the aftermath would be terrible. The woman whose husband was in Saarbrücken was afraid that the men would be taken away to rebuild the devastated countries. To which the old man replied: 'I am quite in agreement with that, I think it is only fair. And anyway, we did not ask the foreigners whether they wanted to come. We just brought them here and made them work for us.' He looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes as he said: 'I hope they will take the right ones.' I nodded, feeling quite pleased.

Telling the Truth

During our conversation the girl had not said a word but she listened with great interest and her face got redder and redder. I began to feel uneasy, then the woman from Saarbrücken said. 'How we talk, it might get us into trouble.' To this the old man and the other woman replied: 'We are only speaking the truth.' The old man turned towards the girl: 'That's so, isn't it, miss? We must speak the truth and not tell lies.' The girl became a bit embarrassed and said: 'Yes, yes, we must tell the truth, but how should we?' Once more we were all in agreement.

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Disciples

In the waiting room a soldier sat at the next table. As I learned later, he was attached to the Red Cross of the Panzer troops. He was selling cigarettes to his neighbours, a Mark per cigarette. As he suddenly began to juggle about with rationing points, I became interested and asked him to sell some to me too, but he refused. When he found out that we were going by the same train he joined me. After some hesitation he told me that he came from a big military training centre and was on his way to Strasbourg. When he saw that I quite understood that he was not in a particular hurry to get there he became more frank. He had already spent several days on the way. He always had the bad fortune that the trains he wanted to use were so overcrowded (and if they were not, it was all the same) that he could not possibly take them. It was eleven in the morning and he had been at this place since the previous afternoon. As he saw a man on the platform surrounded by a crowd of people he wanted to know what was going on. He was told that a new paper was being sold. Whereupon he remarked, 'A paper! I am not interested. The truth is not in it anyway.' He spoke quite loudly and distinctly. The soldiers standing near him nodded agreement without saying a word.

Another soldier who had come from the Eastern front and had to report for duty at Marburg took advantage of the confusion caused by the bombing of the lines to visit his wife in Cologne. He had not had any news for a long time and wanted to see for himself whether they were still alright at home. He was risking being a day late. I asked what would happen to him if he was found out. He said that he would probably get a fortnight's C.B. I said to him that if he was risking C.B. anyway, why not make it worth his while and stay longer. He agreed and said he might make it a bit longer.

While we were talking two Hitler Youths of about fifteen got in and started sorting out their papers. I asked them whether they had volunteered for service. They replied: 'Long ago.' To that the soldier, who was about twenty-five, remarked: 'If we are trying to win the war with children we are in a bad mess.' The two boys smiled in a superior manner.

An air-raid alarm had sounded. We were standing near the station in front of an air-raid shelter. C. was being bombed. We saw squadrons, one after the other, pass against the blue sky. Suddenly a man next to me said: 'There is no German air-craft over this territory!' "

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[Extracts from a report from Hamburg]

These are extracts from a report from Hamburg written in September 1944.

A Terrible End

The heavy air attacks upon Hamburg have strengthened the feeling that a terrible end is preferable to endless terror. The news of the bombing of other big German towns, such as Frankfurt, Koenigsberg and Leipzig has had a very demoralising effect. During the devastating attack upon the port of Hamburg on June 20th, 1944, when the people of Hamburg could see clearly the American planes, the absence of German Flak roused a feeling of despair even in Nazi party circles.

After such experiences people from all sections of the population were heard to say: 'Let the British come anyway, they have always been fair.' This was not the opinion of just a few individuals; on the contrary, those who dared to express it generally found a very good response. Those who thought differently had often to keep quiet because they were shouted down. Instances of that kind occurred in queues.

Naturally such 'troublemongers' were sometimes denounced to the police, and the Gestapo came on the scene. Arrests on such occasions were, however, comparatively rare because the Gestapo knew that these would only increase unrest. To avoid the danger of big queues being used for mass demonstrations offices which used to have long queues were decentralised.

Arrests from small queues, at food shops for instance, were frequent. A little while ago, when vegetables were not available, a woman said: 'If they want to starve us anyhow, a collapse would be better.' A member of the 'Deutsche Frauenschaft' ('German Womanhood'), an organisation well known for its spying activities, managed to have this woman and the shopkeeper arrested.

V1, V2, etc.

V1 had aroused great expectations; People were made to believe that a single shell from it would destroy a whole district. But when they realised its real effect they were disappointed and depressed. People were convinced that V2, V3 and other Vs existed but lately one often hears the remark that it is high time to use them or they will come too late. It was reckoned that V2 would be used in August; this was expected to be a much improved machine for air defence, which would also play an important part in naval warfare.

Soldiers more optimistic

As compared with the mood on the home front soldiers on leave were much more optimistic. We could check up on this until the end of July.

There were a number of reasons for this. Before soldiers were allowed to go home on leave they had to attend special training courses many of which were quite clever from a propaganda point of view. Furthermore, the new weapon had just been put into operation, and last but not least, the soldiers at the front were specially disturbed at signs of unrest inside Germany. The propaganda lie that Germany had lost the war 1914-18 because the home front collapsed was deeply rooted in their minds.

The Revolt of the Generals

An elderly soldier whom I met showed, however, no signs of optimism. He said that he and his old comrades were convinced that the war was lost. Unfortunately, Germany would probably not capitulate so long as Hitler was still in power. Concerning the failure of the generals' revolt he said: 'Serves these people right, they should have prepared the whole thing better. The next attempt will not be made by generals but by soldiers who fought at the front, that will offer better prospects for success.' This soldier took his civilian clothes along when he went back to the front, as the kind of job he did in the army enabled him to hide them.

During the days following the generals' revolt there were definite signs of general unrest. The whisper went round: 'The generals know more than we. They know that the war is lost and that Hitler won't capitulate. Therefore they want to put him out of the way.' There was great indignation at the hanging of the officers. Many people were of the opinion that the key men of the putsch were not caught and that the movement had taken on greater proportions than Goebbels admitted.

Himmler still efficient

In spite of everything: the Nazi party and the Gestapo are still masters of the situation. Thanks to the subtle organisation of the party apparatus they are able to wield a decisive influence over a great mass of the population. Although small party officials like 'Blockwarte' or 'Zellenwarte' may be convinced that the war is lost they still toe the line. This is due to the iron discipline within the party and also to the fact that a Nazi official feels that he stands above the mass of the people.

To give an instance: These 'Blockwarte' had the task of visiting the parents of soldiers who had been killed before the Wehrmacht officially informed them of the death of their son. Shortly after his own son had been reported missing, a 'Blockwart' had to make such a 'consolation' visit to one of his neighbours whom he knew to be a good Nazi. His request to be relieved of this task was refused and he was told that just because he was in the same position he could best do it. After the first few words from the 'Blockwart' the father of the fallen soldier tore the Hitler picture from the wall, trampled on it, shouting threats against Hitler. Thereupon the 'Blockwart' turned to go with the remark that he would rather not hear this as he had to report on the visit. He added that he well understood the grief of the father and therefore had heard nothing. After the 'Blockwart' had left, the neighbours who had heard the shouting of the father,

came in, saw the picture on the floor and heard his threats. One of the neighbours reported this to the local Nazi group whereupon the father and the 'Blockwart' were cross-examined. The father of the fallen soldier was only warned, his past record and his political conviction being regarded as extenuating circumstances, the 'Blockwart', however, was penalised because he had not reported what had happened. Next time he will probably report in order not to be punished for humane consideration and a good heart.

This incident is typical of the Nazi effort to educate the German people and specially the German youth to become 'tough'.

The Gestapo have their so-called 'Vertrauensleute' (men of confidence) in all large and medium, and even in some small work-shops. They are in no ways conspicuous and are not known to their fellow-workers as being hundred per cent Nazis. They report to the Nazi authorities about the spirit of the workers, about rumours, political jokes etc., and on the behaviour of the management. Their womenfolk are also instructed to inform their husbands (or sons) about all they have heard in the queues or in the shelters. All these reports go direct to Goebbels, who uses them as the basis of his articles, speeches, slogans etc. Goebbels' statement in one of his articles: 'We have our finger on the pulse of the people', is true to a large extent. Through these reports he is always informed about the mood of the people. In Hamburg these reports go to the department of the Gestapo whose chief and advisers are all S.S. men and exempt from combatant duties as are the whole of the Gestapo, though they are sent from time to time on special missions.

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Foreign Workers

In this way it was recently (in July and August) found out that the foreign workers were very well organised amongst themselves, that they had representatives who listened to the wireless, and distributed leaflets dropped by the Allies, and that some of them even possessed arms. A large scale search in all the camps with foreign workers had, however, only small success, as this organisation is very efficiently organised. We know reliable German representatives of this organisation. Although great efforts are made to prevent the population from getting leaflets dropped by the Allies - the leaflets are generally cleared away before the all-clear is sounded and the people come out of the shelters and to keep them or pass them on is sometimes punished by death sentences - yet these leaflets are sometimes distributed.

Propaganda

In this way the people know something of the propaganda of the Anglo-Saxons, whereas they know nothing of Russian propaganda. The Russian radio cannot be heard in Hamburg because only few people possess a sufficiently powerful apparatus which can be tuned in on short waves (most of them were destroyed by bombing) and the Russian radio cannot be heard on medium waves; whereas the B.B.C. comes through very clearly on medium waves.

Those who still possess a radio have usually the small 'Volksempfänger' (people's wireless). With these they can hear local stations quite well. But the 'Deutschlandsender' [1] can be heard only under favourable conditions; and only under excellent climatic and other conditions can foreign stations be heard, and then not at all

clearly. Recently, however, it has been possible even with the small apparatus to hear foreign stations in the evening, or at night when the German stations are off the air on account of air-raid warnings. Unfortunately, on such occasions most people are in the air raid shelters or are listening to announcements concerning the actual air-raid situation.

The fact that, on account of the increasing difficulty of listening in to foreign broadcasts, the German wireless has a practical monopoly, means that the people can be misled by German propaganda. Furthermore, extreme fatigue, a large measure of apathy, and lack of the critical faculty may play their part, as well as dread of the very severe penalties for those who are caught.

One more observation regarding leaflets. Before the large-scale bombing of Hamburg in July 1943 no leaflets were found there. After the evacuation of Hamburg a great mass of leaflets were found in the Sachsenwald as owing to shortage of labour the leaflets had not been collected and destroyed. The evacuees studied the leaflets

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very carefully, specially the Polish prisoners of war and the Russian land workers.

Air Raids

The number of air-raid victims of the big attack on Hamburg in July 1943 was given, even by official Nazi authorities as approximately 260 000. The Nazi paper `Hamburger Tageblatt' [2] published an article on the first anniversary of the catastrophe in which it declared that the number of victims equalled the total number of fatal casualties during the campaigns of the Wehrmacht in Poland, Norway, France and Belgium. No figures were given. What happened in the districts of Hamburg-Horn, Hasselbrook and Rothenburgsort which had suffered most and were officially declared to be a `dead city' gives some indication. Since it was not possible to remove the bodies of those who had been suffocated in the big shelters, convicts and pioneers using flame-throwers cremated them on the spot. The ceremonious funeral of bomb victims took place at the Ohlsdorfer Cemetery, attended by the Party and its organisations. Only in some exceptional cases were the relatives allowed to bury their own dead, as a rule they were buried in mass graves. Many church members were very upset about the pressure of the party which enforced mass burials, but in the end they resigned themselves to it, as to so many other things. Any resistance by individuals would be absolutely useless and would be crushed at once. Only in cases of big demonstrations would the authorities refrain from violent repression. But should such demonstrations develop into political resistance - not merely a protest against lack of food or clothing - bombing squads would certainly be used immediately. Up to now, however, such occasions have not arisen.

Absenteeism

Some people have tried to express their protest through absenteeism. It is, however, a rule that clerical workers have to produce a doctor's certificate after three days of absence and manual workers after one day. If the doctor declares a person fit for work and he still absents himself, the factory management informs the Gestapo which forces him to work. The entire health insurance system serves only the interest of the State. The doctors (there are many women doctors among them) are obliged to declare the patients fit for work unless they are gravely ill. A check is put upon by special Nazi doctors, and the whole system of supervision has been tightened up tremendously. In

some cases, especially where clerical workers are concerned, the manager finds it better not to inform the Gestapo because he does not want to run the risk of losing his employee altogether; he would anyway not get a substitute from the labour

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exchange. In essential war work, however, the absence of one worker already has a considerable effect on production and if the manager wants to fulfil his contracts he is forced to keep absenteeism at as low a level as possible; in most cases he therefore calls in the help of the Gestapo. We have never heard of a worker being fetched by the Gestapo more than once but we have never found out what the Gestapo did to them before they were sent back to work - the people concerned will never say a word about it. But the rumour goes that they are first taken to the police station and beaten up.

Corruption

Most people feel that they cannot prevail against the Gestapo and that their opposition is of no use. Repression has created with many people the mentality which makes them prefer to keep on the right side of the oppressor rather than to remain the underdog for ever. We know of cases where the Gestapo has asked such people (even women) to spy for them in their factory, threatening them that if they refuse they will be penalised. In most cases, people accepted this offer - which had also some material advantages - rather than to undergo a heavy penalty.

The Soviet Bogy

The defection of Rumania has had quite a strong repercussion in Hamburg. People commented on it in connection with the generals' revolt, both being a symptom that the war is lost. The soldiers consider that the Rumanians as well as the Bulgarians are good soldiers and reliable Allies.

Goebbels announced straight away that only a small group around King Michael **[3]** had become disloyal; this was received sceptically but aroused the hope with many people that the `patriotic' and `anti-bolshevist' circles would keep the alliance with Germany and that Berlin would remain master of the situation. The general opinion prevails that countries which surrender to Russia lose their national existence. This too, is a result of the Soviet bogy.

Politically enlightened people not affected by German propaganda generally consider the post-war plans of the Allies, so far as they have been published in the papers, as being an obstacle to the German people's readiness to capitulate. Prospects such as that their sons and husbands might have to do forced labour in Russia arouse their resistance to such an extent that many will tolerate oppression and hunger, and even bombing, rather than capitulate. The Goebbels propaganda systematically keeps alive and strengthens these sentiments. All papers stress the `softness' of the British and Americans in view of the Russian demands. People in Hamburg, however, hope that the British will not let the Russians grab this important port."

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - *„Deutschlandsender“ (1932-1945), einer der ältesten deutschen Rundfunksender, aus der „Deutschen Welle GmbH“ zur Verbreitung eines Reichsprogramms über Langwelle entstanden.*
- 2 - *„Hamburger Tageblatt“, zwischen 1933 und 1944 nachgewiesene nationalsozialistische Tageszeitung in Hamburg.*
- 3 - *„König Michael“ = Michael I. von Rumänien (geb. 1921), König von Rumänien (1927-1930, 1940-1947), Thronbesteigung als Fünfjähriger, da sein Vater, Karl II., im Exil war (Regierungsgeschäfte führte sein Onkel Nikolaus), nach seiner Rückkehr regierte wieder Karl II. (bis 1940), dann erneute Ausrufung Michaels zum König (tatsächlich lag die Regierungsgewalt bei dem zum „Führer“ ausgerufenen Marschall Ion Antonescu), durch Entlassung Antonescus Frontwechsel Rumäniens von den Achsenmächten zu den Alliierten (1944), Abdankung unter kommunistischem Druck (1947), Schweizer Exil bis zum Sturz des Ceausescu-Regimes.*