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Germany

The following article is reproduced from a Roman Catholic journal published in a neutral country. Although we are not in agreement with all its statements and conclusions we consider it an important contribution to the discussion on the re-education of the German people on account of its thoroughness and understanding, especially in dealing with the psychological problems.

On the Problem of the Re-Education of the German People.

The problem may be regarded from the point of view both of principle and of educational technique. It is with the first only that we propose to deal in the following pages. We must make one observation which leads us at once into the heart of the matter. Almost everything written by Anglo-Saxons on the problem starts with a false assumption. This false assumption consists of the idea that large sections of the German people, and especially of the young, are permeated and moulded by national socialist ideology. We really ought to begin by stating what we understand by that ideology, but I think we may dispense with a theoretical presentation of its content. For we maintain that there are a mere handful in present-day Germany who are in any way prepared to believe in a secular ideology. That is, perhaps, the most important result of over ten years of national socialist rule. So the problem is not, how can we drive a false ideology out of men's hearts and minds, but how can we fill a yawning inner vacuum with chaos and nihilism? For that is the real danger: open or concealed nihilism, with its inevitable accompaniments, cynicism and despair.

I. Various Points of View

To prove this statement would need far-reaching explanations. We must here content ourselves with a few indications. Nihilist tendencies have been present in the national socialist movement from the beginning and have gained uninterruptedly in force during its development. From the outset faith in the ideology has been but feeble. In the first place, few leading National Socialists probably believed in the ideology that they had invented and proclaimed. In the nature of things that cannot be actually proved. But it seems utterly unlikely that the chief propagandist of the regime, Goebbels, ever for a moment believed in the ideological part of his propaganda. For the leading National Socialists the ideology was always rather an instrument of propaganda, whereas they themselves were "nihilistic realists", feeling themselves in no way bound by the officially proclaimed programme of their own movement, and in practice betraying it without scruple.

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There were, no doubt, "believers" amongst the following. How large their number was is now only a question of historical interest. There is much to suggest that their number has been immensely overestimated. In any case, they are now practically non-existent: whether because they are among the fallen on the foreign or home front, or because they have come to participate with resignation or secret opposition, or, finally, because they joined the ranks of the "nihilist realists". In so far as they are still believers, they are certainly not among the party leaders, for an insight into the discrepancy between the real aims and the ideology is absolutely fatal to such belief.

Many who have passed as "believers", really fall into a different, and a very large, category. These are they who thought they could interpret the ideology as the intensification or exaggeration or distortion of aims in themselves great and just. The most varied tendencies and elements met on this ground, having only one thing in common: political immaturity. We might divide this category into three, though the dividing line is sometimes blurred. First those who might be described as "realists bound by tradition". They were largely recruited from military and industrial circles, though they were not identical with those sociological classes. They believed neither in the theory of the master race, nor in the Third Reich, nor in the leadership-principle, nor in anti-Semitism, nor any other part of national socialist ideology, but merely held that it was good and necessary to raise German prestige in the world, to strengthen the imperial idea, to attain a sharper discipline in public life, to reduce the too great influence of the Jews, and, especially, to combat Bolshevism. Chiefly they hoped to restore order in civic life.

We might describe the second sub-division as "worldly mystics". As they had lost all genuine connection with religion, or retained it only to a very slender extent, they [felt] victims to idols. The narrower and more prosaic their everyday life, the more need they had of ecstasy and inspiration through a kind of mysticism of this world. For them the marches, fanfares, banners, songs, torchlight processions and "domes of light" produced by searchlights were provided. There were numerous cases in which bitter opponents of the ideology were "overpowered" by these things at a Party Conference or similar occasion, and then found themselves inwardly compelled to render the ideology harmless, or at least so to interpret it that it no longer stood in the way of their need for an inward mysticism.

Thirdly, there were the "revolutionaries", in a bad and a good sense. In a bad sense, in so far as it was a case of anti-social and morbid elements, opposed to any social order, seeking "adventure" as a form of life suited to their nature, and determined to give rein to their brutal and criminal instincts. To them the ideology was a source of great amusement, though not, of course, in public. Their role in the party increased and, for comprehensible reasons, they cannot be considered as subjects for re-education.

For "revolutionaries" in the positive sense of the word the conviction was decisive that the old-established civic order was played out. They had not reached this conviction through training or prolonged reflection, like the organised workers, but through the unemployment which had overwhelmed them, and through evident signs of degeneration in the middle-class world, whence they sprang for the most part. These were not only black-coated workers and lower middle-class, but also intellectuals, and, primarily, young people. They could not accept the Marxism either of the Social Democrats or the Communists, for they did not wish to be "materialists". For the rest, they were in any case not looking for ideologies" but for "deeds". They were weary of the "useless chatter of the parties", they wanted "to force their way through" to a new

order in social and public life. Especially the younger of them were given plenty to do by the national socialist movement, as the temperament of youth demands.

The movement did not appeal to them by theory, but summoned them to actual struggle, appealed to their "heroism and loyalty", promised them "greatness", and set them positive tasks. The ideology was felt as a kind of musical accompaniment, which was accepted, tolerated. Let us emphasise here that this evasion of ideologies and questions of principle appears to be characteristic not only of contemporary German youth, but of the youth of other lands. There is no desire to think and talk about questions and action, but for the facts and deeds themselves, immediate and direct; hence people turn away from philosophy to technical science.

If hardly any belief in national socialist ideology was to be met with among the above groups, who in one way or another, helped the movement to victory by active participation, still less was there, of course, among the masses of the passive, and non-political followers, who, for various reasons, let the party have its way, mainly because, until it seized power, they had a simple faith in its promises to establish order and decency in public life. In many ways their attitude was like that of the "realists bound by tradition".

The "opposition" was wholly immune from the national socialist ideology, paying for its resistance either with life or liberty, or conducting it secretly in a nerve-racking struggle.

Wholly inadequate as the above remarks are as an explanation of past occurrences, they may perhaps suffice to make clear why we maintain that the re-education of the German people has nothing to do with the eradication of an ideology. We might almost say that the task would be easier if that were the case, for then we could convince and "convert" on a rational basis. In actual fact, however, it is a matter of overcoming a certain manner of life which by its very nature destroys the values of personality, of overcoming a radical mistrust productive of utter incapacity to believe, in short, of building up a positive dam against the rising flood of nihilism.

II. Germany's Greatest Danger.

National Socialism did not fulfil an ideology, but realised a possible form of mass existence. It did not, indeed, create the masses, but neither had it the aim of overcoming them; on the contrary, it sought by every means to extend the masses, and to mould life in accordance with their nature, thus enabling them to exist. Only a small "elite" was to be raised above them and trained to command them. National Socialism would hardly have succeeded within measurable time in dragging the population on so wide a scale into the life of the masses, if a terrible ally had not emerged in the form of total war. We must here state expressly that two things have mightily promoted the true work of National-Socialism - the mass-bombing by the Anglo-Saxon air forces and Anglo-Saxon war propaganda. The former had extended to a sinister degree the material conditions of mass existence; the latter has robbed many Germans of the hope of ever escaping from those conditions and taking part, as free men and women, in the mental and economic rebuilding of Germany and Europe. They fear that the formula of "unconditional surrender", the identification of the people with the regime, the failure to apply the Atlantic Charter, the threat of complete deprivation of economic, political and military power, are clear indications that they are once more to be degraded to mere

objects. And further, much that is written in England and America about the re-education of the German people gives the impression that even

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in the intellectual sphere they are to be reduced to objects for treatment; and that, just as happened under National Socialism, a new flood of propaganda is to be let loose on them, that they would have to exchange national socialist intolerance and enslavement of the conscience for an Anglo-Saxon brand of the same, working with opposing symbols, but no less effective. There can be no doubt, indeed, that the oppositional elite in Germany has its eyes turned westwards, but it might come about that it would be condemned to helplessness - if, that is, at the critical moment it were deserted by the West, as it has been deserted since 1918.

Indeed the whole problem of the re-education of the German people might become meaningless for a long period, if Germany were to turn to Soviet Russia. In spite of the perpetual use of the well-worn Bolshevik bogy by national socialist propaganda, this danger is intensely real. For Soviet Russia is the only country and regime, besides the Third Reich, which offers a system of mass existence. In this vital matter there is the closest kinship between the Third Reich and Soviet Russia. We have already seen how small a part is played by national socialist ideology. All that is needed is a change of leadership at the top, not in the lower ranks, in order to switch over the whole machinery of the Third Reich to Soviet Russia. The whole thing would go through almost without a hitch. What a temptation for a people that is dead tired; for the activist elements in the army and the party, who would ask themselves, where shall we be able to live and work in our former style; for the many who, without possessions or home, no longer feel that they have the hope and strength to make a new independent start from nothing, and give themselves the weary comfort that in a collective system of mass existence they could at least exist; for the young, who would hope to find in Soviet Russia the spirit of sober practicality and technical science which is so familiar to them, in which alone they believe - this together with wide spaces and an organised system of planning. Shall they wax enthusiastic instead for the West seems to offer, at best the cramped life of lower middle-class existence in a Germany of small states, in which they will not even be allowed to fly? For according to the will of the Western Powers Germany is to have no air service. Just imagine for a moment what that means to a German boy of to-day, for whom gliding and the life of a pilot are absolute ideals. Will he not reject everything that is said to him of freedom and the dignity of the individual as hypocritical cant?

III. Plans that must Fail.

What we have already said should make it clear that the re-education of the German people will become meaningless and impracticable, unless it implies winning the German people for reconstruction in the spirit of European tradition, and that will be impossible in practice, if the West places this people under a material and spiritual oppression which expels it from the European community.

The re-education of the German people cannot, then, be attained by the mere propagation of a doctrine, even if the best imaginable pedagogic methods are adopted. Doubtless the statement of clear principles and the revival of ideals springing from the European tradition are important and indispensable, but they are not enough. It is rather of the utmost importance to allow the German people a social order which will enable them really to live according to these principles and ideas. In that respect the

mistrust of the Germans towards the Anglo-Saxon world has grown uninterruptedly. Much has happened in the course of the war which confronts just the thinking section of the German public with the question: are there not plentiful signs that during the war the Anglo-Saxons, without being aware of it, have themselves failed to resist the spirit which

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lives and acts in National Socialism? And if they have insufficiently stood the test of total war, how will they stand the test of total victory?

But an even more vital question arises for any Germans. Even if we have no doubt as to the beneficence of Anglo-Saxon intentions, can we consider at all reconstruction in accordance with Anglo-Saxon social order? Can we, even if we would, return to a bourgeois culture in the traditional sense? Can we master the problems of our public life with parliamentary democracy and those of our economy in the forms of private capitalism? Indeed, will the Anglo-Saxons solve their own social and economic problems in that way? Are not the masses in England and America already afraid of the peace, because, in spite of victory, it might mean renewed insecurity for them? Added to those negative considerations are other and positive ones. For people are too apt to forget that the Third Reich - like Soviet Russia for that matter - was, among other things, a realm of social and economic experiment. Valuable and varied experience has been gathered, which people are not prepared to sacrifice, especially not if it could be used in the service of other aims than those of national socialism. But it is not only in the technical field, interpreted in the widest sense, that positive beginnings have been made. The same is fundamentally true in the life of the spirit, especially in religion. In a conscious and ceaseless struggle against secularisation and the new paganism, people have attained, in many places, to a new vitality and realism in religious life, which they are no longer willing to exchange for a placid and merely traditional ecclesiasticism. It would, therefore, be a great mistake to regard the re-education of the German people as the saving of a patient dangerously ill, possible only by means of violent treatment and operation. The body politic of the German people has still enough vitality and healthy powers of recuperation; what it needs above all for its recovery is calm, and tolerable conditions of life.

IV. The Task before Us.

Nevertheless, it is not meaningless to speak of re-education. To continue the above metaphor, what is wanted is active support of the process of eliminating the poison, which is not to be achieved by anti-toxins, but by the positive stimulation of vital energy. If we want to cure the German people of militarism and nihilism, the surest way to accomplish this is by integrating them positively and concretely into the new European order. Let all appropriate measures be adopted to prevent a German hegemony in Europe, but let Germany be given a part in a genuine European reconstruction, in a new start. People make things too easy for their consciences and too difficult outwardly, when they say that the German people are by their character, especially after more than ten years of Hitler-rule, neither willing nor qualified to co-operate in this way. It is true that Germany's support for a European policy cannot be looked for with certainty and as a matter of course. It may be, as we have already said, that large sections of the people will once more give themselves up, weary and despairing, to a nihilist and activist minority, which is prepared to exchange the national socialist totalitarian system for one of national Bolshevik character. But the subjective

conditions for a decision in favour of Europe are likewise present. Perhaps the chances, in respect of these subjective conditions within the German people, are fifty-fifty, so that the decision will be essentially dependent upon the practical attitude of the victorious Powers themselves. It would be an incalculable disaster if the Western Powers, all too mistrustful, did not realise what a powerful task of re-education of the German people has already been performed by the national socialist regime, in a way not intended by it, but in favour of the Western Powers, or rather of Europe,

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through the experience of five years of war ending in defeat.

If Germany should be occupied in such a manner that the English, American and Russian troops take over the occupation in three separate sectors, the experiences of the population under the particular occupying forces would certainly not be without influence upon Germany's choice. Those experiences will exercise their influence as a whole; not, that is, simply the experiences in the field of education, but also of industry and politics, right down to the everyday attitude of the soldiers towards the people. Much would be gained if the occupying powers succeeded in winning the co-operation of such groups of Germans as had the confidence of the people and represented the healthy forces within the nation. All might be lost if the co-operation of German "Quislings" were considered enough, for then the revival of nationalism would be inevitable, and it might come about that at a later date the former Third Reich would receive a halo that would be a mockery to all historical truth, and that a new Hitler would arise. With regard to the problem of education it must be specially borne in mind that there is nothing more intolerable to a nation than tutelage in the cultural sphere. If, under Anglo-Saxon occupation, the German people were made to feel that they were regarded, à la Hitler, as an inferior race, that there was an idea that they needed to have culture supplied to them, that at best Germany was regarded as a sphere for cultural missionary labours, then indeed the consequences would be disastrous. Equal cultural rights are an absolute condition of the re-education of the German people.

It is not a mere assumption, but actual fact, that to the German people Europe, from being a mere intellectual conception has become a concrete idea, more so than has been the case for centuries past. German armies have been stationed in almost every European country, millions of workers from all over Europe have flooded Germany. However harsh the measures and regulations of the regime, they have not been able to prevent people from getting to know one another. Manifold practical ties have arisen. Many Germans have learnt to think, to act, and to live on a European scale. At the same time they have found out how all fruitful beginnings have been promptly poisoned by the cynicism and terror of the Party rule. They have, so to speak, witnessed a demonstration that the new Europe cannot arise by the rule of force, but only by mutual understanding and co-operation. Let no-one believe that these unintended lessons of national socialism have left no mark on men's minds. The strongest support of nationalism, the conception of the national state, has been undermined in Germany more, perhaps, than anywhere else.

This point, perhaps more than any other, shows that the problem of re-education is by no means confined to Germany. The whole task of re-educating the German people might, in fact, be imperilled if, at the very moment when the idea of the national state was becoming undermined in Germany, this idea and nationalism threatened to gain firmer hold on the rest of Europe. If the task of re-educating their own people is not realised in time in the other countries, the outlook for the re-education of the German

people will probably become almost hopeless. In actual fact the situation does not appear so hopeless as it might seem, to judge by the press and the wireless. It is just the people in the formerly occupied countries who had plentiful concrete opportunities of observing the difference between the German people and the national socialist regime, of experiencing it, so to speak, in their own persons. None the less, many will, of course, transfer their feelings of hatred to the German people, but there are nevertheless indications that a minority at any rate in those countries is resolved to resist the wave of hatred and to work for the reconstruction of Europe as a whole. It will probably be seen very soon after the war that this is not only a matter of realising an ideal, but also a concrete, objective

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necessity, since the reconstruction and recovery of Europe seem hardly possible on the basis of unlimited individual state sovereignty and a rivalry between national states.

What is necessary, therefore, is not merely the re-education of Germans, but of Europe; and here, in our opinion, education directed to Franco-German understanding takes first place. For many decades small groups in both countries have been convinced of the necessity of this work, because they saw clearly the fundamental importance of Franco-German relations to the future of Europe. The attempts failed because the idea of the national state still stood firm, not - as has been said repeatedly - because of any incompatibility between the French and German character. In the re-education of the French and German people one of the chief aims must be to wean both peoples from their ambitions as Great Powers and to turn their minds towards European federation. In our opinion it would be a misfortune, if the federative idea were realised in Europe in such a way that the two countries belonged to different federations. That would involve the danger of such federations degenerating into systems of alliance that would carry on the old rivalries. Only a federation which brought France and Germany together would be genuine, capable of bringing a new life to the great cultural values of the European tradition. It would secure improved material conditions for both peoples, peace in Europe, and secure Europe's position side by side with that of the Great Powers. Education towards this goal will probably find further support in the fact that France and Germany are faced at home with very similar mental, social, and political problems. In France, likewise, the danger of nihilism is raising its head; there, too, it will be impossible to return to a bourgeois order; there, too, new ways of democracy must be sought.

We will not here discuss the ultimate spiritual foundations of re-education and the practical pedagogic methods for its accomplishment. We would only express the conviction that both should form the subject for the work of practical discussion groups. In every European country a practical discussion group should be set up for the purpose, consisting of teachers, representatives of the churches, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, economists and historians. These groups would have to be in constant communication with one another. In this way a European elite could undertake the re-education, not only of Germany, but of Europe, as a common task.

Italy

The following two letters by Pietro Nenni [\[1\]](#) were published in the American socialist journal "The New Leader" [\[2\]](#); we think they should be made known to readers in this country too.

Rome, September 22, 1944

My Dear Antonini [3]:

I regret very much the fact that I shall be away from Rome during the last days of your stay among us. You have visited our provinces, you have spoken with our comrades, you leave, with the vision in your eyes of the material destruction which we have suffered, of the miseries tormenting us, and of our political difficulties. I know that we can count on you to help us in any way you can.

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I wish also to thank you very much for the generous contribution you have given to our propaganda work. The Socialist Party is the center of the struggle for the democratization of Italy. It will strenuously maintain its position and its autonomy. A party of the workers, it advocates the union of all the workers, outside of which there will be in Italy no other alternative but the black terror or the red terror.

I beg you to convey our greetings to the comrades you have represented here in Italy, and give them our assurances that our only ambition is to be worthy at all moments of the esteem and confidence of the American workers and of the workers of the world.

Fraternally Yours,

PIETRO NENNI.

* * *

September 22, 1944

Dear Comrades:

I understand that the Italian Socialist Party's appeal for the early convocation of an international Socialist Conference in order to discuss problems of peace from the labor and socialist point of view has aroused great interest in America. It appears, however, that there has been much discussion concerning the scope and limits of our proposal as it was outlined in the open letter to the British Labor Party published in "Avanti" [4] of August 13.

Here I am more specific.

I am in favor of the calling of a conference which will include all the labor forces, from the British Labor Party to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, from the labor organisations of America to those of China.

However, I know that he who wants too much, ultimately gets nothing, and that we are not yet ready for a conference of this kind.

The proposal of our party is, therefore, for the time being, much more limited and specific. We ask for the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Labor and Socialist International, as it was constituted in 1939, in order to discuss ways and means for the urgent convocation of a World Labor conference for peace.

While the war is fast approaching its end, I consider of the greatest urgency the resumption of international activity on the part of the Socialists.

Until now, the trench, the underground conspiracy, or the jail, have been the natural places of our activities. The coming peace will bring us face to face with new problems, which we must examine with great urgency in order to prevent and resist any imperialistic or nationalistic turn of events.

Socialist greetings from your comrade,

PIETRO NENNI.

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - *Pietro Nenni (1891-1980), italienischer sozialistischer Politiker (PSI seit 1921), Emigration nach Frankreich (1926), Verhaftung durch die Gestapo und Auslieferung an Italien (1942), nach seiner Befreiung Generalsekretär der PSI (ab 1943), stellv. Ministerpräsident (1945-1947), zugleich Außenminister (1946-1947), Bündnis mit den Kommunisten (1948-1956/57), erneut stellv. Ministerpräsident (1963-1968) und Außenminister (1968-1969), Mitgründer und bis zu ihrem Zerfall Präsident der „Vereinigten Sozialistischen Partei“ (1966-1968), Ehrenvorsitzender der PSI (ab 1973).*
- 2 - *„The New Leader“, seit Oktober 1928 zweiwöchentlich erscheinendes amerikanisches politisches Magazin, herausgegeben von der amerikanischen Labor Conference on International Affairs, sozialistisch und antikommunistisch.*
- 3 - *Luigi Antonini (1883-1968), italienischer antifaschistischer Gewerkschafter, Emigration in die USA (1908), Vizepräsident der "International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union" (ILGWU; seit 1925), Mitglied der "Anti-Fascist Alliance" und Präsident des "Italian-American Labor Council", Briefpartner Nennis (1934-1947).*
- 4 - *„Avanti“, 1896 in Rom gegründete Zeitung der italienischen sozialistischen Partei (PSI), seit 1911 Sitz in Mailand.*