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Germany

We reproduce below the preface to a pamphlet published by a German emigrant in Belgium who was formerly a leader of the Socialist Youth Movement in Western Germany. This pamphlet contains the reprint of letters he distributed in 1943 amongst officers and soldiers of the Wehrmacht in occupied Belgium. Although we are on the whole in full agreement with the author we wish to point out that there are certain differences as regards our respective political tactics.

Freedom - Letter to the German Wehrmacht

The Freedom-Letters to the German Wehrmacht were published between February and September 1943 in the district of the Western High Command, specially in the occupied districts of Belgium and Northern France. They were produced in several thousand copies on typewriters and duplicators of the Wehrmacht; they were addressed in the main to the officers in all sections of the Wehrmacht and were sent to them in various ways: as letters by ordinary mail, as leaflets distributed in the garrison, and as circular letters passed on from hand to hand. Numerous copies were smuggled into billets, into camps of the Organisation Todt or were dropped as leaflets in front of barracks; this form of distributing the leaflets was, however, much more difficult and dangerous.

The first Freedom-Letter to the German Wehrmacht was published after the Stalingrad disaster which, for the first time since the outbreak of the war and after the years of victory and illusion, made those who had preserved a minimum of mental independence accessible to anti-fascist arguments. Discussions with medium-ranking officers and with officials of the military administration - e.g. captains, lieutenant-colonels, naval captains and administrative officers - had convinced the author of the necessity and the possibility of extending the discussion through the medium of leaflets.

I want shortly to describe the atmosphere in which the Freedom-Letters to the German Wehrmacht were published:

In contrast to the ordinary soldiers who spent their lives between the barracks, the public house and the soldiers' cinema and were hard to contact politically it was relatively easy to enter into political conversation with the officers. Their requisitioned flats in the most elegant districts of the town were ideal meeting-places outside Gestapo control.

In this way the author got to know many anti-Hitler officers. But although distinction of the highest order testified to their military courage only a very few had even a vestige of that courage which Bismarck called "Zivilcourage".

The disaster of Stalingrad was followed by a number of equally disastrous defeats in the South and the East and thus proved to be the turning point of Germany's military fortunes; at that time a resolute action on the part of the German officers' corps, namely the overthrow of the dictatorship followed by a peace offer, might have saved Germany. Tens of thousands of officers realised that but lacked the courage to act.

Many of them did not even feel how undignified their passivity was. With apathy they faced the destruction of Germany and doped themselves with expensive alcohol and cheap love. There has never been so much alcohol and never so many prostitutes in any garrison as in the Nazi garrison during the later years of this war. The officers knew that they were dancing upon a volcano, but like the degenerate nobility of the ancien régime these scions of the degenerate bourgeoisie thought: *apres nous le deluge!*

Although the flood of destruction ravaged Germany they wanted to "live" and therefore indulged in what pleasures they could find while their home country went to rack and ruins.

There were, however, officers who were filled with burning anxiety as to the destiny of their fatherland. In nocturnal meetings we discussed not only errors of the past and aims for the future but also possibilities of active struggle against Hitler. During these discussions the fatal trait of the German national character once more revealed itself: the lack of revolutionary initiative.

Bismarck who himself only believed in "revolutions from above" in Germany deplored that the Prussian officers "lacked in readiness to take over responsibilities unless they had received unambiguous instructions". The Freedom-Letters to the German Wehrmacht were received with much approval, even enthusiasm on the part of the officers who readily passed on to me addresses of their colleagues or superiors to whom these letters should be sent, at the same time, however, they refused to favour their distribution to soldiers and employees in their charge. We had prepared a voluminous memorandum addressed to the "Officers in Command of the German Wehrmacht"; they expected this to result in the repetition of the action of a Yorck von Wartenburg^[1]. But they themselves refused to do as much as to take the initiative in a leaflet-campaign.

The typical German lack of revolutionary initiative is concealed behind the typical German formula of "Revolution from above". Throughout their history the German has always followed the command of his superior instead of the command of his conscience.

During the late autumn of 1943 the distribution of the Freedom-Letters had to be stopped. Gestapo-measures were increasingly tightened up and the author had to go into hiding which considerably restricted his freedom of movement; moreover, various troop-movements made it very difficult to maintain the necessary contact with the different distribution centres.

During eight months three thousand copies of the Freedom-Letters to the German Wehrmacht were distributed. The Memorandum destined for the German High Command reached about hundred high-ranking officers of all sections of the Wehrmacht from the Commander of a regiment to the Field-Marshal.

The Freedom-Letters are an attempt to continue the fight against Hitler which their author had carried on since 1933, underground and during his emigration, together with

tens of thousands of his comrades; this attempt was made quite independently of German emigre-organisations and of the propaganda-service of the Allies. Some socialist and Catholic German emigrants, friends of the author, had given him material and political support in his work.

As one of the leaders of the Socialist Youth Movement in Western Germany the author was forced to emigrate and was consequently deprived of his German nationality by the Hitler regime on account of his political activity. But although he had lost the rights of German citizenship he did not feel absolved of the duty to fight for the freedom of Germany. Although "stateless", the author always felt the obligation to take a political attitude which clearly distinguishes between anti-Hitlerites and anti-Germans. To fight against Hitler meant for us to fight for Germany, for a truly reformed Germany which honours social justice, political freedom and national dignity. In opposing the injustice, serfdom and depravity of the dictatorship German fighters for freedom should therefore not join a front directed against Germany but should wage an independent, and therefore especially difficult struggle. The peoples threatened by the imperialism of the Nazi dictatorship wage a just defensive war. But the ways and means of the German struggle for freedom against Hitler's dictatorship were different from those of the European Liberation Armies fighting against Hitler's war machine. Even as regards the aims of the fight against the Third Reich full agreement between the German and the European enemies of Hitler could be reached only in those cases where the latter were prepared to grant a new and better Germany equal rights and equal living conditions within a new European community.

It is therefore hardly necessary to stress that the Freedom Letters to the German Wehrmacht were neither published nor influenced or favoured by the Allied propaganda-apparatus. They did not even make use of the Allied information service, nor of the broadcast from London or Moscow. The slogan: "Overthrow Hitler and Save Germany" was issued in the Freedom-Letters before the creation of the "Free Germany" Committee in Moscow, its purpose was unknown to the author even at a time when their publication had ceased. They were therefore neither organisationally nor politically connected with this Committee.

Ghent, September 5th, 1944.

The Author.

We reproduce the second Freedom-Letter to the German Wehrmacht: It was headed:

Who is to blame for the War?

"The Army we have trained is growing more rapidly from hour to hour. These days I am filled with the proud hope that the hour will come when these wild troops will grow into bataillons, the bataillons into regiments, the regiments into divisions, the old ribbons will then be lifted out of the dust, the flags will fly in front of us; then reconciliation will come at the eternal last Judgement at which we are ready to appear."

Adolf Hitler, "Mein Kampf"

Who is to be blamed for this war? Who bears the moral responsibility for the biggest disaster which has ever befallen mankind?

Every nation conscious of its national and of its European responsibility will have to pose and answer this question.

In the spirit of objective self-criticism and ardent love of truth every people will have to search for the guilty in their own midst, lest the peace will be built upon the brittle foundation of national hatred.

Objective self-criticism and ardent love of truth are the two conditions for an understanding between the peoples and thus for a European renaissance without which the nations of our continent will not be able to live.

In these pages Germans talk to Germans. For the sake of the future of our people, we Germans must first put the question who are the guilty in the Third Reich.

In putting this question we must distinguish between propaganda and truth. Hitler himself has testified as to the value of his propaganda in a sentence which was expurgated from "Mein Kampf" as late as 1933:

'The German people does not realise to what an extent a people can be deceived by those who seek the support of the masses.'

There is a document, independent of the changing day-to-day propaganda, nearly four million copies of which have been distributed throughout Germany for eighteen years: "Mein Kampf" by Hitler.

Being the "Bible of National Socialism", the "holy" book of the Third Reich, it contains the unchanging aims of the Fuehrer's foreign policy.

These aims are wars, wars again and again!

War first against France, then against Russia, and finally against the whole world!

You can read for yourself in what stages Hitler described the conquest of the world in "Mein Kampf":

'Not until one has stopped to let the energies of the German nation wither away in merely passive defence but gathers them for a final active conflict with France and throws them into a final decisive battle with the highest ultimate aims on the part of the Germans; not until then shall we be able to terminate the eternal, and in itself so fruitless, struggle between us and France; this, however, only on condition that Germany regards the destruction of France only as one means of at last providing the possibility for our people to expand in another direction.' ("Mein Kampf", p. 766).

First the "destruction of France", then the attack upon Russia, "the giant empire in the East, ripe to collapse":

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'In speaking to-day in Europe of new territories we can only think in the first place of Russia and her border States' ("Mein Kampf", p.

742). `... then the new Reich must once more set itself on the march along the road of the former Teutonic Knights in order to conquer with the German sword the soil for the German plough.' ("Mein Kampf", p. 154).

This tremendous territorial expansion must be equalled by an increase of the population:

'The correctness of this foreign policy will not be recognised until after less than a hundred years later two hundred fifty millions Germans will live on our continent.' ("Mein Kampf", p. 767).

This, however, will only be possible if at least hundred million Europeans will be exterminated or driven away from their present homesteads. Hitler squarely faces this:

'No people on this earth possesses even a square metre of territory through super-natural command or on the basis of super-natural right; state frontiers are created through human beings and can be changed through human beings. The right consists in force alone.' ("Mein Kampf", p. 740).

From the operational basis of a gigantic empire Hitler then wants to dominate the globe:

'A State which devotes itself to the culture of its best racial elements must one day become master of the globe.' ("Mein Kampf", p. 782).

'The most superior race as master people, supported by the means and possibilities of the whole globe' („Mein Kampf", p. 422).

This ultimate aim Hitler could attain only through global warfare, the material and moral preparation for which was started during the first hours of the Third Reich.

What Hitler wrote in "Mein Kampf" in 1927 regarding moral war preparations has become reality ten years later:

'Then, from the children's primer to the smallest provincial paper in the country, every theatre and every cinema, every poster and every empty wall must be put into the service of this single great mission, until the anxious prayer of our present patriots "Lord, liberate us" has changed in the brains of the smallest boy into the ardent request: "Almighty God, bless our arms."` (p. 715).

The gigantic extent of the material war preparation Hitler admitted himself when he stated on September 1st, 1939 that during six and a half years he spent more than 90 billion Mark for re-armament.

Hitler has willed the war from the first hour of his political activity, he prepared it from the first hour of his political rule!

In "Mein Kampf" Hitler had written his own indictment, his is the main moral guilt for this war!

But, of course, for the Second World War one cannot blame one nation alone, not solely the will and the action of one man; there are also a number of economic and political causes for it: the unjust distribution of material goods, the capitalist economic crises, the iniquities of Versailles; the number of guilty persons is numerous too: the bourgeois rightwing republicans of France, the reactionary conservatives of Britain who gave Hitler moral and material support. They granted Hitler successes in the international sphere to save the Nazi-regime during internal crises which arose in the course of its fight against the German people.

European reaction has supported Nazism as a bulwark against revolution on the Continent in the same way as the German reactionaries welcomed Hitler as a saviour from revolution in our fatherland.

They all are responsible for this war which none of the peoples wanted!

But we shall only be allowed to investigate the question of the war guilt in its big historical perspective after we Germans have rid ourselves of our war-criminals.

Lest Hitler's "Mein Kampf" becomes the indictment against our people:

Overthrow Hitler and Save Germany!

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - *Peter Graf Yorck von Wartenburg (1904-1944), Widerstandskämpfer, Urenkel des preußischen Offiziers und Generalfeldmarschalls Hans David Ludwig Graf Yorck von Wartenburg (1759-1830), im Staatsdienst (ab 1927), aus christlicher Gesinnung heraus Gegner der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft, Mitbegründer des Kreisauer Kreises (1942), enger Vertrauter von Stauffenbergs, nach dem 20. Juli 1944 zum Tode verurteilt.*