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Germany

Governmental Pronouncement by the new Bavarian Premier. Speech by Dr. Wilhelm Hoegner *[1]*, Munich

As Premier in the new Bavarian Government, I regard it in the first place as a debt of honour to thank my predecessor, Mr. Fritz Schaeffer *[2]*, for having stepped into the breach so selflessly when times were hardest after the most terrible defeat in German history, and for having placed himself at Bavaria's disposal. From the outset his Government was only regarded as a stop-gap, a transition to some broader solution. The present Government rests on the wider basis of all forces in the country which have either opposed National Socialism from the first, or have at any rate come to recognise it as the greatest enemy of all the institutions and traditions of our European civilisation.

The new Bavarian Government is resolved utterly to destroy the influences of National Socialism in our public and economic life, especially in the civil service.

Justice will be the guiding star of our whole judicial policy. That means first and foremost the restoration of a clear judicial order, a clean juridical system, and the equality of all citizens before the law, without regard to race, class, or religious and political creed. But justice also demands that at last those National Socialist criminals in the Third Reich should be called to account who have managed to evade the arm of the law. Justice further requires the utmost possible help from public funds for the unhappy victims of National Socialist crimes.

We have received a practical lesson which will remain unforgettable to all future generations. We know now what happens when the foundations of human co-operation are destroyed - the community of free and equal persons, the spirit of brotherly tolerance, respect for higher laws and for the religious and political convictions of our fellow-men. In view of the terrible moral degradation of our people through National Socialism, we must begin at the beginning to restore a well-ordered community life, establishing in the first place good nursery training, and proceeding gradually to the higher forms of social life. But to regard these tasks as incapable of fulfilment would be to despair of our people's future. The Government will, therefore, devote the utmost attention to questions of education, to the promotion of those spiritual and moral values common to all civilised peoples.

We do not envisage any fundamental change in the relation between the church and state. Rather do we most earnestly desire that church and state should work, not in opposition to one another, but in harmony for the well-being of the people. Present or future differences of opinion will be overcome in a spirit of tolerance. We strongly repudiate the attitude of the totalitarian state towards the church.

But our immediate task is to preserve the bare lives of millions of our people. We are faced with what may prove an early and severe winter, probably the hardest winter in all German history, menacing our town-dwelling population with hunger, cold and pestilence. We must not continually wait for foreign help, we must try to help ourselves to the best of our ability. Only in so far as our own powers are inadequate have we the right to ask others for help. The rehabilitation of our economic life is only possible if it is planned in advance. First the essential needs of food, clothing, and shelter must be met. The state cannot, at this stage of reconstruction, leave industry to work at its own will and pleasure with profit as the primary aim; it must provide help first and foremost for the impoverished elements in society. That requires good organisation, but not a rank growth of bureaucracy, which we shall take care to avoid.

This Government is a government of all workers in town and country. It is composed of Social Democrats, Communists, influential men of the Christian Social movement, and the peasantry, as well as experts. Although we, an impoverished people, cannot make large promises in the matter of social policy, yet every honest worker must be guarded against exploitation. The right to recreation and a minimum wage, to legally regulated hours of labour, to a paid annual holiday, and proper care of the old and the sick - these are for us essentials. We warmly welcome the permission granted by the occupying Authorities to re-establish free Trade Unions, independent of the state. We shall call for the co-operation of the Trade Unions and give them every support, as guardians of the interests of the employees. The Government will do everything in its power to secure the restoration of Trade Unions funds stolen by the National Socialists.

We must and shall devote our utmost attention to the feeding of the people, in view of the total lack of imports. We have in our opinion shown a due sense of the importance of agriculture by appointing as Minister one of the leaders of the peasants' organisation. One urgent task is to bring about a closer association among our agricultural co-operative-societies. Peasant ownership will be guaranteed. The Government, for its part, expects the peasants to fulfil their duty by delivering their produce and not allowing the towns to starve. The peasant, who is required to deliver his produce, has a claim to the protection of the state. But security in the country is in parts disturbingly inadequate. The Government is firmly resolved to end the scandal of looting, and for that purpose to face the necessity of high expenditure, which it is hoped need be for a short time only.

The problem of refugees in Bavaria constitutes one of our most serious anxieties. Our country is required to provide food and shelter for more than three million refugees coming across our frontiers. That is beyond our power for any length of time. We must help these uprooted people, with the assistance of the occupying Authorities, to return to humane duty to care for them, and not to let them perish. The same is true of all the victims of war, those suffering from burns, the widows and orphans, the soldiers returning from captivity and finding themselves homeless and destitute; all these must be saved from utter ruin and re-integrated into our economic life.

Economic and financial questions frequently extend beyond our own borders. It goes without saying that broken threads must be gathered together as speedily as possible. In spite of the inevitable heavy taxation, economic life must not be crushed. In view of the experience already gained, a more socially equitable form of the Emergency Tax is contemplated.

In a vital political direction we expect to make progress, namely towards democracy. The Government welcomes the permission of the occupying authority to form political parties, and its decision that local elections are to take place. We hope for the opportunity to form parties on a national scale. Local self-government, recognised of late as the essential basis of democracy in the Anglo-Saxon countries and in Switzerland, will be restored here, too, as widely as possible. Until

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parliamentary elections can be held, the Government will endeavour to prepare the way for a democratic political system in the State as well as in the municipalities. We regard ourselves merely as trustees for the Bavarian people, and will render an account of our trusteeship to the future representative body. The Government will summon a committee of representative men from the whole country and from all classes in the near future, in order to prepare important political measures. We believe that in so doing we are not only meeting an urgent political need, but are helping to promote the revival of public opinion after twelve years of suppression.

Now that Bavaria has been recognised as a State, a law must shortly be framed, defining for the time being the State's powers. That will help to strengthen the central Authority and put an end to the arbitrary powers which local authorities have frequently assumed. We shall co-operate closely with the neighbouring states in the American zone of occupation in all matters of common concern. We wish also to keep in touch with the other German territories, especially with the Palatinate, closely associated with Bavaria since the year 1214. The Government desires honourable co-operation with the occupying Power, resting upon mutual trust. We repudiate decisively all secret methods, all hole and corner trickery. We wish for peace, and we turn away from the spirit of violence and insolence, which has led us to the deepest misery in our history.

These aims of the new Bavarian Government, here briefly sketched by me, are modest in scope. We avoid senseless promises. We may be thankful if we escape with our lives from this ghastly collapse of an empire and people. We know that fine speeches do not satisfy people's hunger. As far as possible we shall let our actions speak for us. At least we will show a good will in the effort to help our people gradually to rise from their present condition. Success does not depend upon us alone. It will develop gradually. The horrors of the war are past, the labours of reconstruction are slowly beginning. That justifies some hope. Such hope is a delicate plant and needs care, if it is not to wither. May we be permitted to glimpse, through to narrow gateway before us, a brighter future beyond the darkness of these days. That will raise up our people once more, and fill them with renewed strength which we all so sorely need.

Allow me, as a legal man, one last word. However hard our fate may be, it is bearable so long as it is just. Justice demands punishment and reparation. But it does not demand destruction and death. To-day we must pay the penalty as a nation for the crimes of degenerates in our midst. But the penalty must not be beyond measure, it must be in keeping with the guilt. The greatest guilt incurred by the German people is that they did not oppose wrong with sufficient vigour when it was rising to power, but allowed it to develop with rank growth, till it spread like a cancer. By defeat in the world war, by the destruction of our towns, by irreparable losses of human life, the German people, of whom we Bavarians feel ourselves an integral part, have already paid a heavy penalty. It is time, then, to tell ourselves that the dishonour has been paid for by the decent section of our people, that we may raise our eyes and look the victors openly in

the face. We all desire that that moment may not now be too far distant. With this desire and this hope the new Government enters upon its heavy duties, and asks for the active co-operation of the whole Bavarian people.

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[A Letter published in the "British Zone Review"]

The following letter appeared in the "British Zone Review" **[3]**, a fortnightly Review of the activities of the Control Commission for Germany (B.E.) and Military Government.

"Sir, - I for one am sorry that Sub. Lawson **[4]** is sorry that she feels sorry for the people of Berlin." Why should one feel shy about a decent human sentiment, whatever its direction?

We should certainly not allow our immediate impressions of Germany to blind us to the more general misery that reigns throughout Europe from Rotterdam to Stalingrad. The Germans are not unique in their sufferings, and no doubt more Germans deserve to suffer more than anyone else in Europe. But that does not mean that we should be indifferent to indiscriminate suffering here or anywhere else.

Our moral sense seems to have got confused. And to me it seems that this confusion has arisen largely from confused thinking on the problem of Germany's collective guilt. Two kinds of guilt must be broadly distinguished (of course they overlap). On the one hand is the guilt of those who formed and were directly concerned with executing Nazi foreign and domestic policy in its worst aspects. These men are being punished individually. On the other hand is the guilt of those who sat by passively or carried out orders unthinkingly; who did not or would not know of the worst horrors of Nazism; who wanted to believe and did believe that any such horrors were purely inessential - an ebullience of revolution which would soon settle down; who finally would not protest for fear of the concentration camp, for fear of losing their jobs or of involving their family in reprisals. The punishment of these men (and of the tiny but courageous minority of more or less active Anti-Nazism.) is the present state of Germany.

It does not seem to me that the guilt of these latter people differs in kind (in degree it does) from the guilt of others outside Germany who found it more comfortable to forget the seamy side of Nazism and thought it possible even in 1938 to do business with Hitler. Let the Englishman who saw from the first the true nature of Nazism, and is confident that he would have risked the concentration camp to oppose it, arm himself with indifference against the sufferings of German women and children.

There is much truth in two quotations from the German classics which to-day are in the minds of many Germans; "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" and "Alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden" ("World history is world justice" and "All guilt is punished on earth"). The judgment and revenge of history for Britain's intellectual laziness and self-deception of the 1930s was the near-catastrophe of 1940. The judgment of history on the terrible crimes of some Germans and the terrible self-deception of others, history's revenge for Germany's guilt, is the unprecedented catastrophe of 1945. These judgments are indiscriminate, and strike the provident and improvident, the more and the less guilty alike. Let us not be self-righteous; let us remember history's indiscriminate judgment on ourselves; and let us not pretend indifference to the sight of another and more terrible judgment of history being executed indiscriminately on the German people."

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - *Wilhelm Hoegner (1887-1980), SPD-MdR (1930-1933), Exil in der Schweiz (1934-1945), Ministerpräsident in Bayern (1945-1946), Landesvorsitzender der SPD in Bayern (1946-1947), stellv. Ministerpräsident und Innenminister (1950-1954), erneut Ministerpräsident (1954-1957).*
- 2 - *Fritz Schäffer (1888-1967), deutscher Jurist und Politiker, Mitglied der Bayerischen Volkspartei (1918-1933), Mitbegründer der CSU (1945), erster bayerischer Ministerpräsident nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1945), MdB (1949-1961), Bundesminister der Finanzen (1949-1957), Bundesminister der Justiz (1957-1961).*
- 3 - *„British Zone Review“, von 1945 bis 1949 vierzehntäglich in Hamburg erschienene Zeitung zu den Aktivitäten der britischen Kontrollkommission und der Militärregierung.*
- 4 - *Lucia Lawson, Sub. (= Subalternoffizier), ATS (Frauenabteilung der britischen Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg), Veröffentlichung eines Leserbriefs („Feeling sorry for the Germans“) in der „British Zone Review“ (Ausgabe 2 vom 13. Oktober 1945), der anschließend zu einer breiten Leserbriefwelle in derselben Zeitung führte.*
- 5 - *Duncan Wilson, im Planungskomitee von BBC und PWE („Political Warfare Executive“) für den Rundfunk der britischen Zone zuständig, politischer Berater von Generalmajor Alexander Bishop (1945-1946), übernahm das Referat für Zeitungen und Rundfunk, dem auch die Rundfunkabteilung zugeordnet war, Leserbriefschreiber in der „British Zone Review“ (vom 27. Oktober 1945) in Reaktion auf den Brief von Lucia Lawson: „Feeling sorry for the Germans“. Geburts- und Todesjahr konnten nicht ermittelt werden.*