
Germany speaks

[Heft 1,
April 1940]

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Impressions from the Navy

The crews of the big German battleships are by no means pro-Hitler[2]. On the U-boats, which can almost be regarded as an arm of the Nazi Party, the fanatical Nazis dominate, but on the big ships they have remained a small minority. It is interesting to know that before the outbreak of war the prospects of promotion in the High Fleet were excellent for all young people with technical talent, even if they had been under political arrest or in concentration camps for considerable periods. Such men were never allowed to join the crew of any U-boat.

The political rivalry which exists between the crews of the U-boats and the big battleships extends far into the ranks of the officers corps, although different reasons are responsible for it in these quarters.

The officers at the High Fleet still represent the old type of political conservatives. They are much less popular and far less certain of a career than the U-boat officers, who are usually members of the Nazi Party. Professional and political rivalries are bound up with each other and the officer of the High Fleet is often at a disadvantage. The traditional banquets in feudal style which are known from the last war are still held for the officers' corps of the High Fleet, whilst the crew on the ships which so often lie idle, are subject to the same, largely non-sensical drill.

In spite of all this, however, a certain anti-Hitler feeling goes right through the crew and officers' corps of the High Fleet (although it would be an illusion to over-estimate its significance). A case has been reported from Hamburg in which a U-boat man greeted a sailor from a cruiser in a public house with "Heil Hitler". The sailor replied with an unrepeatable swear word, and was consequently denounced by the U-boat man. Cross-examined by an officer of his ship he said that he had acted under the influence of drink. In violation of the disciplinary code he was not punished.

In a public house in Bremen a free fight broke out between two sailors from a ship of the High Seas Fleet and a few U-boat men who had been showing off in a very provocative manner.

For these reasons the Naval authorities have given orders that the crews of the two different naval units should be kept apart as much as possible. There are special canteens and special places of amusement for the crews of the U-boats, who are given all kinds of privileges similar to those enjoyed by the permanent special patrol troops of the Western Front.

But it is unlikely that this strict segregation will be maintained for very long. On the Western Front, too, the patrol troops, the Nazis' special preserve, will lose their importance as soon as fighting starts on a larger scale. Actually, the position of privilege which the Nazis have occupied on the U-boats, is already being undermined, because

the Hitler Youth and the Stormtroop Departments attached to the Navy can no longer satisfy the mass demand for recruits. As early as December last year, the big battleships were combed through in search of suitable men who were to be selected for six weeks training courses for U-boat service.

In a number of cases men have been transferred to service on the U-boats, who had held responsible positions in the Socialist Youth Movement right up to 1933, and who have remained loyal to their convictions up to the present day. Others were transferred who had never been members of any Nazi organisation. Amongst the new recruits there is no enthusiasm at all. Some of them have sent photos of themselves to their relatives at home as "Last greetings" accompanied by very depressed letters.

Although these symptoms have no immediate political significance, their military importance is considerable: a shortage of enthusiastic recruits for

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the special Nazi elite troops is becoming apparent and they, more than anything else, are the indispensable conditions for the successful acts of bravado which have been carried out in the past.

From the Works Councils of the Republic to the Nazi Works Councils

The following incident has been reported from Berlin:

An old workman in a Berlin workshop, in his excitement over a conflict with his foreman, formulated the difference between the present Nazi Works Council and the earlier one as follows: "That's the position - in the past we threatened you with the Works Council, now you threaten us with it!"

A minor Catastrophe for the Works Leader

In our workshop no daily roll-call is held. We have not even a weekly or monthly factory meeting. All we have is a kind of Annual General Meeting. Our Works Director is over-burdened with works. Of course, you must not suspect him of regarding these meetings as highly inconvenient obligations. That would not be fair to him as a member of the Nazi Party! Anyhow, at the end of the business year he did call a factory meeting. But he did not take sufficient care to ensure that it went according to plan.

The meeting was held in the hall of a public house. When I entered the hall, vivid pictures of similar scenes at meetings held during the time of the Weimar Republic came into my memory. The room was full of smoke; the workers were sitting by long rows of tables - I noticed almost all the same old faces. Everyone had his glass of beer in front of him - some were already drinking their third or fourth glass. How often had I seen similar scenes in the years of economic crisis? The workers could not really afford to drink beer then, nor can they afford it now. But the misery of their existence must be drowned in alcohol.

Only the platform looked quite different. There was the works director and his deputies, the whole management staff, the Labour Front officials and the leader of the factory shock brigades.

The works leader gave a survey of the past business year and thanked everybody for

their sacrifice and co-operation. Silence. He said that he expected the same for the coming year, which would require much greater efforts. A few "hear, hear"s. Then the Labour Front official rose to speak. But nobody listened. They all knew what he had to say. Then the works leader asked for comment. A few Nazi block stewards had assured their colleagues before the meeting that they would voice complaints about some of the worst evils. This assurance had been given in a small circle. But in view of the presence of all their superiors they did not dare to come forward. They preferred to remain silent.

But the audience was becoming more and more restive. An old colleague got up and said: "Let's face facts. What we need is an increase in wages. It is no good talking around this point. If there was a will to help us, the way would be found. But I had better sit down now, otherwise I shall end up in a place where no one wants to be." General applause. Many more wanted to speak. One asked the Leader a few questions: "You spoke of the successes and gains of the last year. Gains - I assume that means more money! But none of us present here have seen any of it. (Great applause) Where has this money gone to, may I ask?"

The question was ruled out of order by the platform. Laughter in the hall. Another man got up and said: "I have only a very modest request to make, namely I wanted to be treated as a human being." When some one else mentioned a technical matter which wanted putting right, the director replied that this would be taken in hand and he would make a note straight away. Several men then shouted: "Not necessary! The note is still there from last year."

At this juncture the works leader thought he had to take things in hand, he stated that he was the leader of the firm and that the workers were the followers who had the duty to follow. With these words he declared the meeting closed.

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For a long time the events that had taken place at this meeting formed the topic of conversation amongst the workers. The Nazi shop stewards were thanked in due course for their "courageous behaviour". They did not feel too easy about it at all. Those who had spoken at the meeting were the heroes of the day. We had noticed quite well that most of the people present, though keeping quiet, had followed the course of the meeting with undisguised pleasure.

I did not speak either. The time was not ripe yet. But the soil is already being prepared. One of the workers said to his colleagues in an interval at work: "Things will not become better for us until those can speak who are compelled to be silent at the present time."

Communal Listening in the Factory

If important Nazi speeches are broadcast during working hours for which the workers are paid, nobody minds much if he has to listen. But most people get very annoyed when they have to attend a "communal listening" outside their working time. But they have to stay to "show their interest". If, however, a broadcast falls in a period between the end of one shift and the beginning of another, everybody from the first shift rushes home as quickly as possible. At home most of them switch their wirelesses on, even if they do not want to listen at all. For otherwise some one might denounce them for not having paid due tribute to the speech. Of course, if one listens to foreign station, one behaves in exactly the opposite way.

Those who are in the factory at the time of broadcasting, assemble at the place fixed for the "communal listening". It is usually some odd corner or other. In our workshop it is a department where work can most easily be suspended. Seating accommodation is only available in so far as goods are lying about which can be used for the purpose. The most favourite places are those nearest to the door. If there are any wagons standing about many people like to climb on them. Recently a man thought of lying down to be more comfortable, and at once his example was followed by many others. We soon noticed how quiet they became up there. Of course, this did not escape the attention of some workshop spies either. They went to wake up the sleeping colleagues.

Very few of those who listen to these broadcasts show any sign of interest. Only when the speaker puts across a good joke is there any response at all. In our big works I have never heard any real applause. Personal contact with the audience means everything to the Nazi speaker who depends on the tricks of mass propaganda. Without it his speech has no effect.

The stormy applause, which comes through the wireless, sounds strange to the listeners in the workshop. Some get fun out of trying to find out whether the applause is "spontaneous", or whether the claque causes it directly or in response to a deliberate pause made by the speaker.

Since communal listening usually takes place at times of great political tension, those who received some political training in the working class movement in pre-Nazi years, try to analyse the speech. It may indicate certain trends in the political and military situation and hint at likely developments of the future. It has become more and more customary to pay attention not so much to what is being said as the way in which it is said, and also what is not said in the speech. All this forms the subject of discussion among those with a political understanding. In this way, the communal listening becomes most profitable for the enemies of the Nazi Regime.

Sabotage

One morning three driving-belts were found cut in a workshop at the Felten und Guillaume **[3]** Works in the Muelheim district of Cologne. Sabotage being suspected an enquiry was held, but the affair remained a mystery.

Two workers were arrested for alleged sabotage in a smaller Cologne factory which is now since the outbreak of war turned over completely to the production of barbed wire for army requirements and is therefore subject to especially strict disciplinary measures.

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An attentive study of the German daily Press shows that cases of arson are on the increase, and it is admitted that they include cases of plain sabotage. How greatly concerned the Nazi authorities are at the possibility of sabotage can be seen from the Ministry report No. 52, 1939 containing Himmler's **[4]** circular of December 21st, 1939. This document calls for more efficient precautions against fire and for greater care in guarding against the sabotage of stored materials and for a constant supervision of the building in order to prevent a recurrence of the cases "of damage to factories due to negligence or even to deliberate sabotage" which have lately been on the increase.

There follows an interesting case of sabotage taken from the German Press itself:

"Br. was formerly employed in a mine in this district. During the time from August to

October of last year it was found that the machinery was being damaged by someone putting a wooden prop under the conveyor belt or by some similar means, the result being a stoppage of the entire system for some little time. The work of transport had to be suspended in the sections affected. One day the culprit was caught in the act. It was the above-mentioned defendant, who sought to excuse himself in court by saying that his only reason for damaging the conveyer belt was that he hoped to get a short breathing-space from work, as for certain reasons he was unable to get his proper rest at home. The accused confessed to having damaged the conveyor belt on four occasions - on the final occasion he was interrupted before he could achieve his purpose." ("Nationalzeitung", Essen, March 1st, 1940).

Letters from German Housewives

"In not one shop could we get a single gherkin, pickled cucumber or any other kind of cucumber." -

"I wanted a permit to get a pair of winter overshoes. The overworked elementary schoolmistress was so annoyed you would have thought I had tried to borrow a hundred marks from her personally. With shrill indignation she replied. "No, it's quite impossible, what on earth are you thinking about!" -

"Elegantly dressed ladies, to their discomfiture, find that they are the objects of marked attention when they ride on the trams or appear in the streets. It's true that even now they generally use their cars. Where do they get the petrol from! I'm afraid that's a mystery to me - I'm not one of the initiated!" -

"On the occasion we wanted eight pencil sharpeners for our schoolwork. We enquired in a shop, and were told they were only allowed to let us have two. It took a lot of argument, but finally we did get our eight ... To this day I haven't been able to get a broom, although I've placed an order in three shops. And a dust-bin is quite out of the question, I suppose I've got to hold the refuse in my hand until they come for it? Our gas smells like an overworked lavatory. What do they make gas of these days? Not coal, anyway." -

"I'm buying Vitamin C tablets. We get so little green stuff and so few oranges. Perhaps it will help a bit if we go over to tabloid food. It seems that green stuff isn't being imported any more, and here everything has been frozen. Salad oil is impossible to get, though so-called butter and margarine can be had. But we have supplies for many years to come, we're in no danger, everything is all right, and we should be grateful that we are living in historic times. You can imagine how uplifted I feel when I open the morning newspaper and read the obituary column." -

"My brother writes from the Western front: `It's a dog's life that I'm leading here in this awful cold, and the only thing that helps to bear me up is the hope of a saner and better future. Life wouldn't be worth living for another hour if one knew that things would go on like this for ever.' " -

"There are two jokes going the rounds here which of course can only have been conceived by a Jew:

Kare says to Lucki: `What are you thinking of doing when the war's over?' Lucki: `I'm going on a bicycle tour to Germany.' Kare: `I see. And what`ll you do in the afternoon?'

`In India one man fasts for the whole nation.' Three guesses: `What happens in

"X (about twenty-five years old and called up) was here for a fortnight with one or two friends, all of them very thin and down in the mouth. We gave him everything we could spare and he looked much better when we had finished with him.

Y (X's father, who is employed in a very important government office), works only thrice a week, three hours each time, the heat is on in only one wing of the building ...

A great many deaths. Life gets more and more difficult. I steadfastly hope for a better future, for an end to all these horrors, and do believe after all in a certain logic of events ...

I spend my time with music and in the study of languages. (In other words, listening to the foreign radio! Editor). I also read a good deal, the old favourites. I've bought a lot of nice things, a good camera, for instance, which I think you would be pleased with. For E. I got hold of a nice collection of stamps issued at the beginning of this century. I hope I'll soon be able to take them to her." (E. lives in an "enemy"-country, Editor).

"But the other people, with whom I don't come into contact except in the way of business, under the influence of the great events that are in train, have become franker and more communicative than they used to be. Very often it is nothing more than a sentence left half-finished, but it establishes a human contact and is very revealing. Such things are noteworthy and very encouraging." -

"Lately I've been thinking of you all a great deal, and saying that we simply must make arrangements to see each other again. Either I shall come to you, or what is more probable, you will all come back to Berlin again, perhaps at Christmas time this year? The rhythm of my life consists of the Great Hope, and not only mines, but that of many others as well. We wait with proud and calm expectation and are preparing ourselves for action; as yet we still keep silence, but the time is coming when our will to action will find an outlet!" -

"Soup-Kitchen" feeding for a Quarter of the Population

Even before the outbreak of the war four million workers and black-coated workers were being fed by the "communal catering" for the works canteens. About one and a half million got their food in institutions, and to these have to be added the building workers employed on the Siegfried Line and other military jobs as well as those drawn into the Labour Service. And in addition, of course, the entire army. Allowing for the fact that war-time demands have increased these figures, we arrive at the result that about a quarter of the German nation has to obtain their food by the method of the "soup-kitchen".

But what are these works canteens like, in which nearly six million workers, male and female, have to get their food!

We learn from several districts, widely separated from one another, that the average price of a meal is about fifty pfennigs, although a year ago the Labour Front laid down forty pfennigs as the "maximum price that could be regarded a socially tolerable". The majority of the canteens are rented on the principle of private enterprise, and the canteen keepers combine with their ordinary business the sale of cigarettes, alcohol etc. Anybody wanting to obtain the rare enjoyment of a piece of meat must therefore be a

good customer of the canteen keeper, or earn his "portion of corruption" in exchange for some other service done for the canteen keeper. This expression, "portion of corruption", is one that has obtained wide currency in all the works canteens. The canteen cook, even more than the canteen keeper, is involved in these corrupt practices and by back-stairs methods does a brisk business in the barter of food for other commodities. Almost always the works cook owes his job to his political, and not to his professional, qualifications, and almost invariably he is hand in glove with the Nazi works overseer. For example, not very long ago, one of the cooks in an industrial suburb of Cologne was arrested on the charge of stealing from the canteen. But as he had been a member of the National Socialist Party ever since 1929, the charge was dismissed.

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The complaint made by the "Westdeutscher Beobachter" **[5]** that "it is to be regretted that a very small percentage of the workers as yet take advantage of the communal catering", has for its explanation, above all else, the miserable quality of the food provided. It consists mainly of dried vegetables - the sort of thing we were accustomed to in the last war. It is highly improbable that it will be left much longer to the free choice of the workers whether or not they go for their food to these canteens; in a short time not simply a quarter of the population, but every inhabitant of the cities, will stand at the ten-urn - with the exception, of course, of the Nazi upper ten thousand!

A Victory for German Women Workers

In a decree dealing with working hours the German Minister of Labour has announced that the Labour Office may lay down shorter working hours for women. "Der Angriff" **[6]** said in this connection on March 16th, 1940:

"This shortening of working hours is already being put into practice in most cases by introducing one free day at least every fortnight for married women in employment. This day can be used by the mothers who are in employment for seeing to important household tasks (washing, cleaning, going to the various food control offices and so on)."

This concession is described in "Der Angriff" as the successful outcome of efforts made by the Labour Front. The more likely explanation of the concession can be guessed from the following admission:

"The gratifying result of these measures is that among married women employees the practice of `slacking' has almost entirely disappeared."

"Slacking", therefore, and not any humanitarian reasons, forced the Nazis to make a concession to the women in the matter of working hours. But with the introduction of this measure the Nazis have only succeeded in falling out of the frying pan into the fire. We quote from an appeal to women employees:

"Particularly in the Western districts it must be pointed out that now the unmarried women are occasionally (!) indulging in periods of `slacking'."

And an admonitory forefinger is wagged at these sinners:

"Every woman comrade should remember that the factory community cannot possibly tolerate slacking . . .

Comradeship demands reliability . . .

The shortening of working hours won for the married women by the Labour Front is being jeopardised.

The German Labour Front expects the unmarried women workers, especially for comradesly reasons, to work particularly conscientiously at this very time."

We find it difficult to believe that this insincere appeal to "feelings of comradeship" will secure the desired reduction in the amount of "slacking" that goes on. It can confidently be expected that the Nazis will be forced to make concessions to the unmarried women as well.

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - Willi Eichler (1896-1971), Autorenzeichen: W-er; Pseudonyme: Werner Buchholz, Ernst Friesius, Martin Hart (MH), W. Reinhart (W.R.), SPD (1919-1925, 1945-1971), Privatsekretär des Göttinger Philosophen Leonard Nelson (1923-1927), nach dessen Tod neben der formellen Vorsitzenden Minna Specht auf Grund seiner Bedeutung im öffentlichen Auftreten und in den Publikationen des ISK wichtigster Repräsentant des ISK, Herausgeber des theoretischen Parteiorgans „isk - Mitteilungsblatt des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kampf-Bundes" (ab 1929) und Chefredakteur von „Der Funke" (1932/1933), einer gegen den Nationalsozialismus gerichteten Berliner Tageszeitung. 1933 Emigration nach Frankreich, hier Aufbau einer Auslandszentrale des ISK zur Unterstützung der illegalen ISK-Gruppen im Reich, außerdem Herausgeber der so genannten „Reinhart-Briefe" (ab Oktober 1933) und des theoretischen ISK-Organs „Sozialistische Werte" (Mai 1934-1940). Ausweisung aus Frankreich (1938), nach kurzem Aufenthalt in Luxemburg Emigration nach Großbritannien (1939), in London unbestrittene Führungsfigur des ISK. Hier u.a. Mitarbeiter der BBC-„Sendung für den deutschen Arbeiter", Herausgeber der Zeitschrift "Renaissance" (1941) sowie - zusammen mit Willi Heidorn (= Werner Hansen) - des Informationsdienstes "Germany speaks" (1940, 1942) bzw. dessen Nachfolgeblatts "Europe speaks" (1942-1945). Unter seiner Federführung Beitritt des ISK zur „Union deutscher sozialistischer Organisationen in Großbritannien" (einem Zusammenschluss der SOPADE mit drei sozialistischen Splittergruppen), deren Exekutivmitglied er wurde. Nach dem Krieg Auflösung der drei Splittergruppen und Zusammenschluss in der SPD. Rückkehr nach Deutschland (1946), Chefredakteur der „Rheinischen Zeitung" in Köln (1946-1951) sowie Herausgeber der Monatszeitschrift „Geist und Tat" (1946-1971), NRW-MdL (1947-1948), Mitglied des Frankfurter Wirtschaftsrats (1948/1949), MdB (1949-1953), besoldetes Mitglied des Parteivorstands der SPD (1952-1958), Vorsitzender der SPD-Kommission zur Erarbeitung eines neuen Grundsatzprogramms (ab 1955) und federführender Autor des Godesberger Programms (1959), hauptamtliches Vorstandsmitglied der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (1958-1971). Mit Susanne Miller verheiratet.
- 2 - Adolf Hitler (1889 - 1945), Vorsitzender der NSDAP (1921-1923, 1925-1945), Führer und Reichskanzler (1933-1945), Oberbefehlshaber der Wehrmacht (1941-1945), Hauptverantwortlicher für die nationalsozialistische Gewaltherrschaft, den Zweiten Weltkrieg und den Völkermord, Selbstmord (1945).

3 - „Felten & Guilleaume“; gegründet 1826, ältestes westdeutsches Kabelwerk.

4 - Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), NS-Politiker, Reichsführer SS (1929-1945), Chef der deutschen Polizei (1936-1945), Staatssekretär im Reichsinnenministerium (1936-1943), „Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums“ (1939-1945), Reichsinnenminister (1943-1945), Befehlshaber des Heimatheeres (1944-1945), federführende Beteiligung an der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft und gemeinsam mit Heydrich entscheidender Organisator des Holocaust, Selbstmord (1945).

5 - "Westdeutscher Beobachter", 1925 im Gau Köln-Aachen gegründete und bis 1945 erschienene Zeitung der NSDAP, erschien zunächst wöchentlich, ab 1930 täglich, wegen antisemitischer Ausfälle, „Beschimpfung der Republik“ und „Erregung öffentlichen Ärgernisses“ während der Weimarer Republik mehrmals verboten oder eingezogen, nach Verbot der sozialdemokratischen „Rheinischen Zeitung“ Verlegung der NS-Zeitung in das beschlagnahmte Verlagshaus (Deutzer Druckhaus).

6 - "Der Angriff", 1927 von Josef Goebbels gegründete und bis 1945 erschienene Tageszeitung der Deutschen Arbeitsfront.