

Germany — Nation of Mystery



Part of the 50,000 German troops in parade on Hitler's birthday.



Foreign officials visit the swimming pool in Berlin's great sports hall.

Traveler Is Baffled by His Impressions on Visit

● The accompanying letter is the second of two which were sent to the editor of *The Tribune*. Because it is so informative of conditions in Germany, it is being published. The first letter, dealing with the writer's observations in Italy, was presented in this section last Sunday. Since it is necessary to protect sources from which this information was gathered, the name of the writer cannot be divulged.

Paris, France. GERMANY baffles me. I have definite impressions of Italy, but of Germany I cannot be sure that my impressions are real or are those conjured up by fear.

Germany is mysterious. It is not natural. It is a military camp at the bottom, but everywhere it appears to be a land of homes, workshops, and culture. It is most difficult to burrow beneath the crust, to know the real thoughts and feelings of the German people.

I was told that there was a lack of butter, meats, and coffee in Germany, yet I never lacked anything of this nature. Butter always was placed on the table, as in any other country, but I know that a good friend of mine, a German, always purchases butter to take home to Germany when he is in Paris. This friend, who is a banker, told me that fats were the principal item lacking in Germany, and also that this deficiency was one of the main reasons for the defeat of the Germans in the World War.

Trying to learn more about the food situation, I went to an ordinary restaurant which was not frequented by foreigners and which catered mostly to middle-class Germans. There I found that butter was not served. A waiter told me that during the winter and until about May 15 it was difficult to obtain any butter at the stores, and then only a limited quantity on a ration basis.

While fats are necessary as foodstuffs, they also are quite essential in the making of glycerin, which is used in the manufacture of explosives. We read a great deal about the strength of Germany, but so little about its weakness. A basic factor of this weakness is the scarcity of fats.

The German people apparently are extremely ignorant of what is going on. A woman I met dropped a few remarks which disclose the inner unhappiness and fear with which the people are burdened—unhappiness and fear which they must keep to themselves and about which they dare not talk.

"We do not know what is going on," she said. "Longfellow once wrote, 'I woke up one morning and found myself famous.' We woke up one morning and found we had taken Czecho-Slovakia."

At another time this woman told me that the exchange difficulties made travel an ordeal. "Life here in Germany," she said, "is just like being on a ship—you can't jump off."

I was in Germany on the day that the Italians launched their attack against Albania. It was Good Friday, one of the important holidays of the Germans. At the palaces of Potsdam, to which I went that day as a sight-seer, were throngs of Germans. Neither there nor in Berlin were there any indications among the people that anything unusual was transpiring. None of the Germans with whom I talked knew about Italy's move against Albania, and neither did I. I tried to purchase American and London newspapers, but there was no news stand that had for

sale a newspaper printed in English. I left a Berlin that apparently was normal and arrived in a Paris that had an atmosphere of tenseness and anxiety.

In Paris I learned for the first time what had occurred.

Germans employed as guides apparently are under instructions to keep military preparations from the eyes of tourists. I visited the tower which overlooks the great stadium in Berlin that seats 120,000 spectators. The athletic importance of this vast structure was pointed out to me, and it proved most interesting. As I was about to leave an old soldier who resembled the kaiser, and who had greeted me with a smart salute and a ringing "Heil Hitler!", directed me with a wink of his eye to a large group of distant buildings under construction.

My guide explained that these buildings were a part of a new university being constructed for the study of military tactics. He said 10,000 students were to be accommodated by the university. As the guide started to walk away the old soldier took me to another window and pointed to another group of buildings. These constituted the new schools for aviation. In still another direction, and lying just at the outskirts of Berlin, were large armament works and chemical plants. I had the definite impression there of vast military organization and preparation for war.

Later I visited the huge new airport under construction in Berlin. I beheld a big hotel within its confines, a postoffice administration building, extensive hangars, and a grand stand seating 20,000 persons. The guide would not say how many planes the airport could accommodate, but he kept repeating that it was big enough for thirty or forty planes to take off simultaneously.

It is impossible in Germany to get any one to talk about Hitler in a frank and open manner. All the people know is how to praise the man, and that probably is the only safe thing to do in Germany. I asked questions: "Are you really happy with this discipline, which denies individual liberty?"

"Is Hitler really and truly popular and supported by a majority of the people?"

"Would the German people support Hitler as long as they did the kaiser in a protracted war?"

"Will the kaiser ever come back?"

Questions of this sort are not answered anywhere in Germany. My guide and even a business man who was with me—a man who travels extensively in foreign countries—only smiled broadly or looked away. I was told by a German that one of the questions of a school examination was:

"Where does Hitler live?" The correct answer to this is that the Fuehrer "does not live in a palace, but in the hearts of all Germans."

This is the kind of talk one is compelled to listen to.

Curiosity persuaded me to go to a vaudeville show where middle-class folk gather for entertainment and where there are no foreigners. The final act was followed by a news reel which

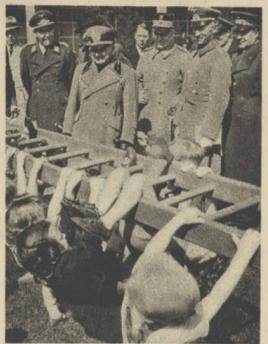


"Hitler does not live in a palace, but in the hearts of all Germans." . . . The Fuehrer receives birthday greetings from German peasants. (Acme photos.)

showed Hitler at the launching of a battleship and reviewing the fleet. The national anthem was played twice during this presentation, obviously to arouse patriotic enthusiasm. The audience clapped their hands only once, and the applause on the whole was far from being enthusiastic. Could this indifference have been due to a lack of enthusiasm for preparedness for war? Or was it due to the phlegmatic nature of the Germans?

The following night I attended an opera performance where Germans of the same class as those who had been present at the showing of the news reel were most vociferous in their applause, calling the singers back time and time again.

I am convinced as a result of this experience in the vaudeville house, where an audience sat in darkness and revealed its inner feelings, that the German people do not want war, that they are not enthusiastic about these warlike preparations, and that there is smoldering within them resentment and fear for their loss of freedom. This, I believe, will assert itself outwardly some day. I asked my acquaintance, the business man, whether or



Children exercising on apparatus in the Reich sports field, Berlin.

not I was correct in my analysis and whether the lack of applause was due to the disapproval of the majority of the people of war or of Hitler. He answered with a smile.

In looking at Germany on the inside, without for the moment considering its foreign policy, a visitor to that country naturally is impressed with what he sees and hears. He is told that Hitler is doing a necessary job for his people. He is informed that the National Socialists have reorganized a country that was collapsing, that they have reunited Germany and developed it spiritually, physically, and economically.

Business as a whole, I was told, is making money (in German marks, of course), people have steady employment, and in fact there actually is a shortage of labor. I was further informed that there had been a great change since 1932, when there was a bitter struggle with communists, with much violence throughout the country. The

Germans give Hitler the credit for saving them.

They told me that the government did not interfere with their business and that all that was expected of them was the payment of taxes. There is a 2 per cent sales tax on every business transaction. A manufacturing company whose plant I visited pays a 40 per cent tax upon its profits. Men of the company spoke favorably of the law of 1936 which fixed the prices for goods, wages, and rents at the level of that year.

No business house or industry may increase above the fixed level without government consent the price of its goods or products. It may sell at figures below this level, but naturally it does not. This price fixing is intended to stop speculation in industrial activity and to encourage steady and continuous operations.

Corporations are free to raise export prices above domestic prices.

A guide whom I had employed, and who told me that he was not a Nazi, became quite emotional when he talked about the qualities of Hitler—in his opinion a real democrat. He took pride in Hitler because, as he said, the Fuehrer did not smoke nor drink and did not love money.

"How can such a great man be so cruel to the Jews?" I asked. In reply I was told that there always had been in the German population an element that hated the Jews. Developments since the war, particularly the economic collapse of 1932, increased this antipathy, I was informed, especially among the groups who were unemployed and lacking in food. While this feeling is general among Germans, they do not defend the methods used by the Nazis to exterminate the Jews.

In a conversation with a friend I reminded him of a statement he had made some time before that there would be no military warfare involving Germany, but rather an economic warfare over a long period of time. In the meantime had occurred the conquest of Czecho-Slovakia. My friend said that the move into Czecho-Slovakia had hardened public opinion in France and Great Britain to the point that the governments of these nations rather than the people themselves were preventing war. Surprised as my friend had been at the turn of affairs, he still was confident that there would be no war. After he had studied the facts involved in the Czecho-Slovakian move he was satisfied, he said, that his government had pursued the correct course.

He said that the British government privately had admitted the impossibility of the conditions existing in Czecho-Slovakia. The result of the Munich agreement had so dislocated the trade, finance, and political con-

ditions of Czecho-Slovakia that its president, according to my informant, agreed with the German government that the only sound solution to the problem was for the smaller country to adopt German currency, German political policies, and enter into the German tariff orbit. The political and economic steps that were taken were those that had been agreed upon, my friend said.

I asked him, if this were true, why the agreement had not been communicated to France and Great Britain. I asked him why the German army had been sent into Czecho-Slovakia on a march of conquest. He told me that the military occupation of the country was carried out to prevent bloodshed. As he explained it, Czecho-Slovakia was sharply divided within itself and had within its borders communists and refugees from many other countries. The German army's job was to enforce decisions agreed upon in the best interests of Czecho-Slovakia, it was explained, with the principal object that of preventing civil war and bloodshed. I was further informed that the German army had been virtually withdrawn from Czecho-Slovakia. On a trip into Bohemia I saw a long column of motorized troops returning.

My friend placed great emphasis on what he described as a fundamental fact—that the treaty of Versailles had prostrated Europe economically, and that for twenty years Europe had suffered from the injustices and wrongs imposed upon it by the terms of the treaty. England has admitted privately these wrongs and injustices, according to my friend, who told me that there were documents in Berlin to prove that these admissions had been made.

Owing to the parliamentary situations in Great Britain and France, it was explained to me that problems affecting these nations and Germany could not be solved peacefully through negotiations, although every effort had been made months ago to do so. My friend said that these problems would have to be settled by force. He contended that Berlin had papers to show that Great Britain early in 1938 had conceded the undesirability of maintaining Czecho-Slovakia as a nation. This understanding, he said, was reached last year in May, but Great Britain asked for time to find a solution. It wanted more time because of its parliamentary situation. It was understood that the solution was to have been found by the first of October. There were negotiations and conversations for months, but no action was taken. Hitler became impatient, it was explained to me, and as a gesture to placate him Runciman was dispatched to make a report. When Hitler finally saw that no solution could be found by the first of October he acted.

The conclusion in Germany is, therefore, that force becomes necessary to remove the injustices and inequalities of the treaty of Versailles and to restore European trade and commerce. Public opinion in the democracies apparently will not deal in a realistic manner with these fundamental economic problems confronting Europe. Furthermore, to restore this trade it is necessary for those nations which have a surplus to assist the nations that are confronted with deficiencies, but no strong nation will give up any rights or territories except as it is forced to do so.

In this connection my friend told a story on Chamberlain and Ribbentrop. It seems the two were getting along amicably in their negotiations. Chamberlain, so the story goes, had conceded the Polish corridor and even was willing to surrender Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland to Germany. Finally, however, when Ribbentrop asked Chamberlain for his umbrella, the prime minister objected, replying, according to the story: "No, that's mine."

In the opinion of my friend who told this story Great Britain's attitude toward the Polish problem is a stupid one. He said that Danzig was entirely German and that it could not be maintained as a free city as set up by one of the stupidities of the Versailles treaty. He said that even the Poles admitted the injustice in taking the city from the Germans. The issue between Germany and Poland, he informed me, could have been settled by Germany offering something else, but now, in his opinion, the attitude of the British makes a compromise difficult.

The Polish corridor today presents one of the most dangerous situations in Europe, I was told, because the Germans never will recognize it as a permanent territorial fixture.

If war does start in Europe, Poland will be the principal country to suffer. The Polish minister of foreign affairs, Col. Jozef Beck, is believed to know this only too well and will seek a compromise. My German in-

formant believes France and Great Britain do not possess air fleets or armies sufficient to send to Poland. He doubts very much whether the British fleet would be able to control the Baltic. On the other hand, in his opinion Germany would not attack France, but rather would conduct a defensive war on its border, while dispatching an army to fight on Polish soil.

I asked my informant why Germany was not satisfied with its present condition, inasmuch as, in my opinion, it was potentially stronger than it was before the World War. I asked him if it was not in the interest of his country to consolidate its gains and to give a sufficient guarantee that it would negotiate the remaining questions peacefully.

He replied that English opinion was not now ready to settle. He made a distinction between the British government and the British people. And he stated that there were two important questions upon which Germany had to be satisfied—the colonies and Danzig.

Incidentally, I was told by some one else that Germany has in mind that if Poland returns Danzig, Latvia may be taken by the Poles. I was told also that if Great Britain does not make a settlement in respect to the question of colonies the Ukraine will have to be taken in order to comply with present German plans.

My informant said that it was ridiculous for other countries to think of Germany as considering the invasion of Holland, Switzerland, or Belgium. Germany's aim, on the other hand, as he made clear, is to bring about again a self-sufficient empire. The present Germany is only about 50 per cent self-sufficient. Germany, in my friend's belief, has no conflict with France, because that country is self-sufficient with its colonies. The conflict, he holds, is with Great Britain, which is not satisfied with world hegemony, but wants also European domination.

The issue, as it was explained to me, is a very serious one, since Germany is determined to bring about an economic unit in central Europe so that it may have trade and commerce and be self-sustaining and self-sufficient.

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