

NEW OUTLOOK

JANUARY, 1933: p. 27

Land Without Rebels

The road back which Germany will select is called one of the great unsolved problems now confronting Europe. Germany's present difficulties are discussed by Count von Pückler, one of Germany's younger writers, who is an American correspondent in Berlin.

By

C. E. Graf von Pückler

MANY BOOKS have been written about the marvelous recovery of the German Reich following the World War. Foreign, and especially American, magazines and periodicals, have published articles about the new spirit in that young democracy East of the Rhine, about the impressive industrial plants built up despite reparation payments. German ocean flyers, scientists and politicians received on the steps of the city hall of New York have renewed old ties of friendship between the United States and the Reich. No more hard feelings, everything was just as before the war—said these articles.

The Germans evidently—look at their business statistics—had mastered an almost hopeless situation. The world learned with satisfaction that a fine new nation had emerged in central Europe. That was the impression given by the printed word.

The regular news reports, cabled by Berlin correspondents to the more serious papers in the United States, sometimes talked a somewhat different language. It seemed that there were financial difficulties in Germany and some political trouble. A man by the name of Hitler, for some reason or other, was being a little noisy, and there were not a few communists. But then, of course, there are always not wholly satisfied workmen, an easy prey to reckless demagogues. With the well known "innate sense of the German people for law and order" being the chief characteristic of the Germans and old man Hindenburg, "statesman, soldier and republican," fathering those 60,000,000 in central Europe, surely nothing could stop the ultimate recovery. Fundamentally, the more cheerful writers told their readers, Germany was on the up-grade.



The truth is that since the World War, and the conclusion of the treaty of Versailles, never have there been fewer signs pointing at a recovery either way,



toward a reconstruction of the old or the creation of a new Germany, than at the turn of the year 1932. Germany's horizon is dark. The hopeful signs that many people have professed to see within the last fourteen years have, as a rule, proved delusions—delusions of people who took the mere destruction of the old for the dawn of the new, of German and foreign busi-

Land Without Rebels

nessmen who thought that the rise of production in Germany was tantamount to the rise of the nation, of bankers who were convinced that credit from abroad was all that was needed to make up for four years of war, over 2,000,000 killed and for the loss of ideals, faith and self-confidence; delusions of those who felt that our great machine age would have no difficulty in replacing spiritual values just as speedily as it knows how to transform an armament manufacturing company into a soft drink plant.



Those who spread the news about Germany's recovery usually had been sent out to find an answer to the question "Can Germany pay?" At any time since the fall of 1918 they had comparatively little trouble in getting a confirmation of the optimistic prejudices which they entertained in this respect. They would soon find some business leader willing to tell them, with all the authority, and more, than his position carried, that Germany was swiftly recovering.

But if the interviewer, eaving the fine office building with this cheerful diagnosis in his notebook, ever took the trouble to stop for a minute on the street to button-hole the first citizen on the sidewalk and to ask him: "How is everything in Germany?" he would have been told a different story. He would have seen despair in the eyes of the middle-class man or woman, hatred in the face of the workman, scorn among the farmers and resignation everywhere.

Both the optimistic business man as well as the down-hearted man in the street, from their point of view, have a good reason for their attitude. The contrast in their outlook, which to this day is pronounced in Germany, is significant. The simple man in the street, whose wage or salary is never much above the minimum of subsistence anyway, even when the country is relatively prosperous, resents the loss of ideals and faith much more acutely than the well-off business man. There were years after the war when German business, chiefly stimulated by a flood of foreign loans, was not doing badly. Much of the profits, it is true, went abroad for reparation payments and interest service, but there was only few unemployed, and wages on the whole were higher than before the war. Yet there has never been any happiness and satisfaction among the German people at large.



While the world learned of Germany's recovery, while French statesmen began once more having sleepless nights under the nightmare of the Teuton giant rising to its feet to lead a war of revenge, and the confidence of international business returned, the German people themselves did not know that they had "recovered" and kept on talking of "peacetime" when they meant the time before the war, before the fateful August of 1914.

They have been suffering for the last fourteen years from a slow process of cultural disintegration. Their ideals and traditions of pre-war days: to love and serve God and your country, to be a good and respected citizen, looked small and old-fashioned after the war. Their savings were wiped out by the inflation of the mark. Their morals were scorned and ridiculed by a snobbish disillusioned post-war youth. Religion was laughed at everywhere. Those who thought they were the intellectual leaders of the new era were in fact nothing but the product of the cultural and spiritual vacuum left over from the war. But their influence was enormous, because the spirit of the people was broken and unable to put up any serious resistance.



Prussia's crushing defeat in 1806-07 caused the rise of a new spirit which overwhelmed Napoleon five years later. When the French imperial armies surrendered

Land Without Rebels

in 1870 the young French republic made a heroic attempt to save the nation. Russia's collapse in the World War brought the dawn of a new era with new and great conceptions of social and political life. But the German collapse in November, 1918, produced nothing. The German people were completely exhausted.



The events of November 9, 1918, when the Kaiser resigned the throne, have come to be called the German revolution. They do not deserve it. The last ounce of strength of the nation had been exhausted on the battlefields of France. There was nothing left for a revolution. Revolutionary spirit was an expression frequently heard then, but that had no meaning outside of summarizing the exhaustion, the disgust and disappointment of the people. The socialists who, in the course of events, inherited the government power from the former authorities, confined themselves to weak proclamations. To create an emergency government in order to prevent the complete dissolution of the Reich, to tear the epaulettes from the shoulders of disgusted soldiers, to remove crowns from the roofs of public buildings, to abolish titles and raise wages was just about all they could do and did to usher in the new age of Marxism. Having no more strength of their own they let themselves be guided by the naïve belief that the Allied powers would be only too glad to help them put the new German democracy upon her feet and to keep her there. When this proved a disastrous fallacy, when the treaty of Versailles began choking to death the young republic, the new government was far too busy with the tasks of the hour to bother any more about revolutionary spirit and ideals.



So the spiritual vacuum created in Germany by the war has never been filled to this day. There seems to be a widespread belief in the world that the German sense for law and order prevented serious upheavals. The fact is, rather, that there were, and that there are now, no rebels in Germany. The German spirit has remained broken. It is not because of their moral conviction that there must be law and order that the German masses have kept relatively quiet, but because they are weak and resigned, because they do not dare jeopardize their jobs, if they have any. Rebels, wherever any showed up, are still disavowed by their own friends. We of young Germany have felt that the allied powers looked to it that Germany was kept in a constant emergency and had to devote its energy to the fight against war indemnities, armies of occupation and economic trouble. As long as Germany was kept on the verge of bankruptcy there was little danger of the rise of a new spirit, a revolutionary spirit. This "danger" will become acute only, if Germany regains a certain independent prosperity, or else goes bankrupt.



The result is that the Germany we find today is a nation where the "decline of the West" is most conspicuous. But the German revolution, a spiritual and probably also political revolution, has only been postponed. In the long run either one of two things must happen: either the old ideals and the old order of pre-war days must be restored or a new system, new ideals and a new morality must be found. So far we have lived through a period of stagnation where neither the reaction has made much headway nor a strong revolutionary spirit has shown up.

Land Without Rebels

The spiritual vacuum created in 1918 remains to be filled.



For the present, reactionary elements, though probably in the best sense of the word, rule in Germany. Patriots, tied by birth and tradition to the old order (and that means to capitalism and the West) are trying to unite the nation. But the struggle of reaction against revolution has not yet begun, for the simple reason that the revolutionaries have not yet appeared. The struggle for political supremacy that we witness today in Germany is, primarily, a conflict among reactionaries. For the Nazis, despite their gradual radicalization, are at heart reactionaries. They are made up of the German middle-class which has always been extremely proud of what separated it from the proletarians. They were the "backbone of the nation" before the war, and it is only natural that they should long for a revival of those days. The socialists have shown, in the years when they were in office, that they had little to contribute to a revolutionary spirit. The centrists, the third large factor in German politics, will always be found where the Catholic Church is, namely, in opposition to new moral standards.

Political parties in Germany today are getting more and more to be nothing except empty vessels which used to contain the political and social philosophies of the past, but now are devoid of any new and great conceptions to catch the imagination and to arouse the potential enthusiasm of the masses. Even the Nazis, with all their spirit of sacrifice and sense of comradeship, have produced nothing but a vague idealism and sentimental romanticism. The German revolutionaries of a probably still distant future, those young intellectuals who are looking ahead instead of intoxicating their minds with the recollection of "the glorious past," are today scattered among all kinds of political parties and organizations. They have yet found neither a common path nor leader. Everything is still hidden behind a smoke screen of literary discussion. The outsider, watching the daily news from Germany, does not hear of them.

The few common ideas they have produced so far are largely confined to politics and economics due evidently to the fact that since the war economic and political problems have been most urgent. This may serve as a rough outline of their economic and political ideas, vague as they still are:

Germany is no longer to be a capitalistic nation. Her economic life and business is to be planned and controlled in some way or other, so as to assure the greatest possible stability. Economic self-containment, as far as possible, will be the premise of this system of "national socialism." But as Germany with her large industrial population depends to a certain extent on commercial intercourse with other nations her foreign trade is to be directed so as to prepare the gradual evolution of a middle-Europe, whose national units, while remaining independent, will be bound together by the systematic exchange of goods. This middle-European bloc, which is to include the territory of the former Austria-Hungary, the Balkan states and Poland, will incline toward Russia rather than to the West.

Those are so far the most tangible points in what may some day be the program of German revolutionaries. It is nothing more than a frame, subject probably to many amendments. What this frame will contain, what the future political and social structure of Germany is to be, it cannot now be predicted with any degree of accuracy. The communist party today, though representing more than one third of the German workmen, is practically outlawed. They are the official enemies of the present state. Yet there is little doubt that Bolshevik ideas and experiences will contribute to the future structure of Germany, although hardly through the dictatorship and their collectivism.

Land Without Rebels

The spiritual vacuum created in 1918 remains to be filled.



For the present, reactionary elements, though probably in the best sense of the word, rule in Germany. Patriots, tied by birth and tradition to the old order (and that means to capitalism and the West) are trying to unite the nation. But the struggle of reaction against revolution has not yet begun, for the simple reason that the revolutionaries have not yet appeared. The struggle for political supremacy that we witness today in Germany is, primarily, a conflict among reactionaries. For the Nazis, despite their gradual radicalization, are at heart reactionaries. They are made up of the German middle-class which has always been extremely proud of what separated it from the proletarians. They were the "backbone of the nation" before the war, and it is only natural that they should long for a revival of those days. The socialists have shown, in the years when they were in office, that they had little to contribute to a revolutionary spirit. The centrists, the third large factor in German politics, will always be found where the Catholic Church is, namely, in opposition to new moral standards.

Political parties in Germany today are getting more and more to be nothing except empty vessels which used to contain the political and social philosophies of the past, but now are devoid of any new and great conceptions to catch the imagination and to arouse the potential enthusiasm of the masses. Even the Nazis, with all their spirit of sacrifice and sense of comradeship, have produced nothing but a vague idealism and sentimental romanticism. The German revolutionaries of a probably still distant future, those young intellectuals who are looking ahead instead of intoxicating their minds with the recollection of "the glorious past," are today scattered among all kinds of political parties and organizations. They have yet found neither a common path nor leader. Everything is still hidden behind a smoke screen of literary discussion. The outsider, watching the daily news from Germany, does not hear of them.

The few common ideas they have produced so far are largely confined to politics and economics due evidently to the fact that since the war economic and political problems have been most urgent. This may serve as a rough outline of their economic and political ideas, vague as they still are:

Germany is no longer to be a capitalistic nation. Her economic life and business is to be planned and controlled in some way or other, so as to assure the greatest possible stability. Economic self-containment, as far as possible, will be the premise of this system of "national socialism." But as Germany with her large industrial population depends to a certain extent on commercial intercourse with other nations her foreign trade is to be directed so as to prepare the gradual evolution of a middle-Europe, whose national units, while remaining independent, will be bound together by the systematic exchange of goods. This middle-European bloc, which is to include the territory of the former Austria-Hungary, the Balkan states and Poland, will incline toward Russia rather than to the West.

Those are so far the most tangible points in what may some day be the program of German revolutionaries. It is nothing more than a frame, subject probably to many amendments. What this frame will contain, what the future political and social structure of Germany is to be, it cannot now be predicted with any degree of accuracy. The communist party today, though representing more than one third of the German workmen, is practically outlawed. They are the official enemies of the present state. Yet there is little doubt that Bolshevik ideas and experiences will contribute to the future structure of Germany, although hardly through the dictatorship and their collectivism.

Land Without Rebels

Having suffered most within the past fourteen years among the nations of the West, the German people are about ready to make an end of that 100-year period which because it is characterized by the predominance of business and money begins to be hateful to them. The Germans are best prepared to submit to the stern discipline of a new morality.

Whether there will be an open clash between reactionaries and revolutionaries will depend on future developments. It is not impossible though the time of civil war seems to be over and the opportunity for revolutionizing Germany by violence seems to have been missed for good in November, 1918. It is more probable that the ground for the birth of a new Germany will be prepared gradually, that new ideas will percolate bit by bit in the next five, ten, maybe twenty years, and that the Lenin of the German revolution will simply execute the will of the people by instituting the new order.

The nations that won the war may successfully try, owing to the moral stimulus of victory, to escape for the present a spiritual, social and political revolution. The vanquished have no choice except cultural decline or an entirely new start. Austria-Hungary, having disappeared completely, only two nations remain that suffered defeat—Germany and Russia. The Russian revolution followed closely on the heels of defeat. The Germans, given to progress on long and complicated detours and slow in recovering from the blow of Versailles, will need more time before they decide to make a new start.



NEW

OUTLOOK

ALFRED E. SMITH

Editor-in-Chief

OldMagazineArticles.com