

(January 13th, 1936)

Germany Today

BY GERHART SEGER.

COLONEL A. L. BISHOP, introducing the speaker, said:— A layman, looking at the map of Europe, and judging from the Press Reports, is very much struck by the strong line of demarcation between two classes of people. On the one hand those who enjoy a democratic form of Government or those with a constitutional monarchy, and on the other those who suffer under that form of Government known as a dictatorship—sustained in power by armed force, rigid censorship, and the strangulation of free thought. Our distinguished guest comes to us from one of the latter, Germany. As a member of the Reichstag after the cessation of hostilities he used his best endeavors to maintain the Constitutions of Weimar, only to become a political prisoner when the Nazis came into power. He was incarcerated, but escaped, and he is here today to tell us of Germany, from which he is an exile.

MR. SEGER:—Colonel Bishop, Gentlemen, and unseen listeners of the Radio audience, I have to start what I have to say today with two personal references. In the first place, I am not speaking in my mother tongue, and I have to apologize for my imperfect English. I have only had three months time in gaol to teach myself, and that is not enough. In the second place, I am speaking of my own country in a foreign country, and from the very beginning I want to make it clear that, although I was a victim of the present German Government, I am not speaking against Germany. Quite on the contrary. I want to point out that Germany is not Hitler, and Hitler is not Germany. Since I have been lecturing in the United States, I have observed that many people make the mistake of assuming that Hit-

ler's being in power indicates that he has a majority behind him. That is wrong. His government is a dictatorship, based on armed force, supporting a minority of the German people. As long as we had free elections in Germany, Hitler was never able to obtain a majority. I realize that, to a certain extent, it is inexplicable how this dictatorship came about. Germany has always been a very military nation, so naturally she did not take her defeat as easily as a smaller nation might have done. So when we lost the war there grew up a very bitter nationalistic feeling, and this feeling was reinforced by the Treaty of Versailles.

There is a certain difference that very few people realize between Germany and other nations. Germany might have been head of other nations, so far as industry, science and civilization were concerned, but she was certainly very far behind in democratic tradition. Whether this is palatable or not, it is still a fact. The average German people were very much more subjects than citizens. This was the very difficult situation, when we got our democratic constitution of Weimar in 1919, and furthermore it was unfortunate that we got together two things, which had nothing to do with each other, but which were associated together in the minds of the German people—The Constitution of Weimar and the Treaty of Versailles.

So this democracy was meeting with a great deal of anti-democratic feeling, for a great number of German people regarded it as new and strange, but as a foreign system imposed upon Germany by her former war enemies, the allies. Therefore, among about one-third of the German people, there was great opposition to the constitution. This we could have overcome in time, but it was at this moment that Hitler very cleverly chose to step in and play upon the nationalistic and anti-democratic feeling. But he did not make much headway for the next ten years. In the beginning of 1930 our parliament consisted of 493 members, and of these only thirteen were Nazis. So after ten years the Nazis formed only a comparatively small group. But within the year 1930 everything changed. Germany, quite suddenly and violently was drawn into the world's economic crisis.

Within one year we had more than ten per cent. unemployed and millions lost the very basis of their existence, and our great and highly industrialized country was shaken by economic despair. Millions of people not only lost the basis of existence, but became the victims of men who profited by the depression to gain power by promising practically everybody everything. I listened to him many times. At the same meeting he could promise employees higher wages and employers lower, and both believed him. He could talk to a gathering of people of all kinds, landlords and tenants, farmers and consumers, and tell them all just what they liked to hear about rents and prices. In that way, helped by the growing work crisis, he was able to increase his votes, but he never secured a majority of the German people. When he was appointed Chancellor in 1933 he had behind him only thirty-four per cent. of the German vote. As you know we don't have a presidential form of Government like the U.S., or a parliamentary form of Government like France. When a man is appointed as Chancellor he does not need a majority behind him, but it was necessary for Hitler to convince the world that he had a majority. There were two courses open to him. Either he could argue with the other parties in the Reichstag and convert them to his views, or he could dissolve the Reichstag and arrange a new election in the hope of getting a majority. He took the latter way, dissolved the German Parliament and arranged a new election in March, 1933. Then, not Hitler himself, but his leading people set fire to the German Reichstag a few days before the election, in order to delude the German people by making it appear, as though we had in Germany a communist danger, which was ridiculous.

But even that crime did not bring a majority for the Nazis. He had only forty-three per cent. of the votes so he was faced with the alternative of resigning or establishing a dictatorship. The latter was what he did, as my own personal example shows. I was re-elected for the fifth time by a huge majority in my constituency on March 5th, but in spite of that I was arrested one week later, like many of my colleagues, for no other reason than that we were

expected to vote against him. Thus he created an artificial majority by arresting all those who might vote against him, and fooled the world, while he established his dictatorship.

I want you to realize that you in democratic countries take for granted a great many things as belonging to civilization, in much the same way as you take electric light, and that you have no conception of what a dictatorship means to the private and personal life of everyone under it. Nazism means that every other party, beginning with the communist and ending with the conservative, is entirely wiped out, its leaders imprisoned, and their property confiscated. It means that every kind of organization, Masonic, religious or anything else, is smashed. There is only the Nazi party left. Newspapers and radio broadcasts are entirely under the control of the Government, and Hitler goes even further, for he and his people are controlling the private lives of the people.

The mails are no longer inviolate. As long as Germany was a civilized country, we had secrecy of the mails. If you mail a letter you are sure that it will reach its destination without anyone opening it. But it is not so in Germany. There every local authority is entitled to open every letter it wants, incoming, or going out. It is impossible to watch the mail of sixty-two million people, but no one dares to take a chance for thousands have been condemned for writing unfavorable views of the Nazis in their personal correspondence. Everyone gets careful. If you have any connection among the German people who corresponds with you do not wonder if he never says anything disapproving of the Nazis. Do you know that it is an offence punishable by one year's imprisonment to be caught even in the privacy of your own home listening to a foreign radio broadcast. It is impossible to watch the homes of 62 million people, but a dictatorship does not seem only to change the public and political form of life. It changes human nature altogether, and not for the better.

It has created a horrible system of denunciation, and if your neighbor wants to show his loyalty to the authorities he denounces you, and it is then up to you to prove that the program you just heard came from Berlin and not from

Moscow. In that way the whole German people is kept in constant fear, and the major weapons used by the Nazis are two.

First, there is the most brutal and revolting political jurisdiction ever known in the history of my country. I will give you a small example, for the little things that are happening from day to day are of much more significance than extreme examples. This is the way one of my political friends who used to help me earned for himself a sentence of one year's imprisonment. One day he and a friend went into a restaurant in the evening for a cup of coffee and to talk. The restaurant was empty so they were alone in the room except for the waiter, but he was a Nazi spy. They kept their voices low, and in the course of the talk my friend asked "When we have so many intelligent people in Germany, why must they pick out Hitler for Chancellor?" Unhappily the waiter overheard him, and he got one year's imprisonment. Judging from what I have heard you people in Canada say about your administration, if you lived in Germany you would spend not only all your lives in prison, but half your time in heaven as well.

Even more important is an institution, which, as I have pointed out, has affected so many thousands of the German people. It is called protective custody. This means that everyone, men, women and children, can be arrested at any time and kept imprisoned for unlimited periods, without any charge being laid, or any trial, or any legal procedure whatever, if the officials of the political secret police even suspect that he or she might misuse his or her freedom in the future to say anything against the Nazi party.

That means that anybody can be arrested and imprisoned at any time, and that sixty-two million people go to bed at night not knowing whether they will get up in their own homes or in prison. That is the terror under which the German people live, and I say that this protective custody is the greatest shame in the history of our country.

I was a member of our foreign relations committee with Goering and others. I knew them well, but in spite of that intimate personal knowledge, if someone had told me

what I was going to experience in that concentration camp, I would have refused to believe it.

I would have refused to believe that a political party could become so degraded that it could organize its sexual pervers for political purposes, and could from two million storm-troopers select only those who were sadists to guard those concentration camps. Nobody would have thought that possible in Germany, yet it is a fact. Whatever you may have read in your newspapers or magazines of the horrors of Germany does not even represent half the truth. I have been in many deadly situations. Once on the western front, I had to jump from a burning plane, when I had been shot down, but I never experienced anything that could be compared with the six months I spent in a German concentration camp. I cannot tell you much about it, it would be too humiliating to go into details. I can tell you this, that there were forty-two men of my creed when I went there, and within two weeks we had already lost two, victims of cruelty, literally beaten to death. And the second of these men died in my arms. If the full truth of that night of terror were told none would believe it, but never will my eyes forget what they had to see. I tremble yet when I remember the state of the body of my friend, swollen and black and blue from top to bottom. And this was only one camp. Do not forget that there were fifty such, with eighty thousand innocent political prisoners, scattered over Germany. It was an experience of horror, and it only needs a few acts of terror in every city to induce everyone to keep his mouth shut.

But they will not always have it all their own way. Under cover there is a strong secret feeling of rebellion. And this hidden force is working against them in spite of the terrorism that supports the dictatorship, and one day it will enable us to get back our free and decent Germany.

I will explain how I was able to make my escape from that camp. Two things were necessary, and one of these we had in the fact that we still had our own clothes. The other was money which I was able to get for my journey afterwards. But I am not going to tell you how I got it. There may be Nazi officials listening to this broadcast and

I am not going to give any information to them which might spoil my friends' chances of doing the same thing.

When the time came I was working with eighty other prisoners and six guards at a small canal in the open country. We had arrived there after one hour's walk. On one side of the canal was a bank of earth thrown up from the canal, and this seemed to me to offer the only possible cover. We were lined up and given orders what to do. One section of men started to dig and we moved round them. Then one of the guards started to give us our instructions. All heads were turned towards him. It was only half a second, but in that time I managed to disappear round the end of the bank, and nobody missed me.

I walked along under cover of the bank, expecting every instant to hear the whistle that would announce my escape and which would have meant an end to all. But nothing happened, so after waiting a few seconds I took my courage in both hands, I ran for five or six hundred yards in the cover of the bank. Then I came to the open, and became a small dark figure on the snow. In order not to appear to be suspicious, I had to appear as any farmer might look going round his fields. So I had to go slowly. And that was the most difficult part of my escape. It is very difficult to escape and at the same time go slowly.

But I succeeded in doing it and made my way back to town. There I called a taxi and went to the station. In Berlin I changed my clothing and took a train to the south. I stayed on the train till I got to the first German town in the mountains. Then I left the train and walked for hours till I saw a small stone. On the back of that stone were the letters C.S.R., and I knew I was safe.

Six weeks later, before I did anything at all the Nazis arrested my wife and seventeen months old baby and put them into a concentration camp, and they were held as hostages for four months. Then I was in England and telling my story to some members of the House of Commons when Lady Astor suggested that all the women members of Parliament should go in a body to the German Embassy and intervene on behalf of my wife. They were successful and got her and the baby out. Then another woman member of

Parliament, Mrs. Mavis Tate, flew to Berlin and brought my wife and baby back to London.

Mine was only one case. I want to remind you that there are still hundreds of thousands of people in Germany suffering in an unimaginable way, waiting for the moral help and friendship of the outside world.

Later I stopped a week with Lord and Lady Astor, and Lord Astor told me that all through the war he had tried to fight against a prejudice against Germany, caused by the stories of atrocities, but now with what he had heard about Hitler and the Nazis, he did not think the stories could have been so far wrong after all.

Now that is just what I want to avoid. If you have any friendly feelings towards Germany please keep them. We don't want to lose the friendship of the world, which Streseman and others were able to regain so quickly. Please bear in mind that Hitler is not Germany and that Germany is not Hitler. There is still our decent country. It may be suppressed for the present, but it will return. There are hundreds of thousands of people like the Jews, condemned to slow starvation for no other reason than their racial extraction. There are hundreds of thousands of Protestant and Catholic people, who were sticking to their creeds, and these form the real Germany that will reappear some day.

What are these forces opposing Hitler, and what are the possibilities of a return to monarchy?

Let me say this. In my personal opinion the former German Emperor made a misake in urging his sons to join political movements. If they had kept out of all political tangles they would have appeared in the minds of the German people as a last refuge. Now that they are mixed up with the whole mess of politics, however, the outlook for a return to monarchy is not so clear.

The forces opposing the Nazis are, in the first place, the Churches, Protestant and Catholic. The Protestant Church opposed him from the very beginning, for theological and administrative reasons. Our Faith—I am a Lutheran—is based on the equality of human beings, and therefore we cannot agree to the horrible Jewish persecution. The Catholics began by attempting to make peace with the

Nazis, and the present Pope was the first power to acknowledge Hitler by signing a concordat. But afterwards they realized that a gentleman's agreement requires gentlemen to make it, and then the Catholic Church began its opposition. And as soon as the churches began to oppose the attempt to organize a totalitarian state, ministers of both creeds were imprisoned in jail and concentration camps.

But I am sure there is hope in the future. Anyone can predict the reappearance of the old decent Germany. Hitler is teaching the German people, very painfully and by imprisoning thousands, the value of democracy. It is a fact of human experience that you do not value anything till you have lost it. You must lose your freedom and liberty before you realize that you cannot live without them.

COLONEL BISHOP, thanking the speaker, said:—Herr Seger, may I, on behalf of the members of the Canadian Club, congratulate you upon your dexterity in a language you learned in three months. Our sympathies are entirely with you, and I think the Canadian Club serves its most useful purpose when it becomes a medium by which facts can be learned which pertain to European countries, and which would otherwise be denied. We are grateful to you for coming here today, and we do hope, for your sake and that of a great nation that has been a leader in literature and science, that the troubles that now encompass it will not be long in passing.