

(*March 13, 1933*)

The Significance of Hitler

BY DR. WALTER KOTSCHNIG

PRESIDENT CHALMERS:—Your Grace, Sir Herbert, Dr. Kotschnig, gentlemen, before I introduce the speaker of the day, I should like to introduce one of the guests at our head table, a friend of this Club who has on seven occasions addressed us—Sir Herbert Ames. Sir Herbert is in Toronto to-day to address a meeting in Yorkminster Baptist Church under the auspices of the League of Nations Society in Toronto.

The speaker to-day will address us on a subject that has occupied the second pages in our newspapers. It seems to me, we are living in an era when earthquakes, bank crises or the establishment of a dictatorship have the front pages. We may assume that banking in the United States will soon be back to normal and that California will soon stop quaking, then we shall be able to fix our attention on what is going on in Germany.

Dr. Walter Kotschnig who is our guest to-day is, in my opinion, rather well qualified to discuss "The Significance of Hitler" which is the title of his subject. His work takes him into many of the leading universities and brings him here to-day. He is General Secretary of the International Students' Service and he has an intimate knowledge of the political and social developments in the different countries, particularly in Central Europe. Like the new German Chancellor he is an Austrian by birth. I have great pleasure in asking Dr. Kotschnig to address you on the subject of "The Significance of Hitler."

DR. KOTSCHNIG:—Mr. President, Your Grace, gentlemen, your chairman had the kindness to authorize me to

introduce my address which; in parts may be heavy—an address on a rather heavy subject—by some light story—a story which will give a fitting background, in a sense, to what I am going to say—a story which characterizes the various national attitudes that we are confronted with today in the world. It is a story which, I think, was born in Geneva. We need a little bit of humor, at times, in order to relieve the tension which exists there. It is a story of the elephant—a story of how the various nations wrote about the elephant—the Englishman, the Frenchman, the German, the Russian, the Canadian and, of course, the man from the United States. They all decided to write books about the elephant. The Englishman went to Africa and he went to India. He shot as many elephants as he possibly could and took snapshots of them, dead and alive, and came back and published a book with many illustrations entitled, "The Elephant—Where to Find Him and How to Shoot Him."

The German went neither to Africa nor India. He simply went to the National Library and obtained all books on elephants he possibly could find and also read a little bit of philosophy. After nine or ten years' hard work, he produced a book—a work in three volumes of six hundred pages each, entitled, "The Introduction to the History of the Origin of the Elephant in Relation to Story Counter-Plots."

The Russian—the Russian just went home and sat down on the bed, smoked many cigarettes, and after long and profound reflection he published a book entitled, "The Elephant—Does He Exist?"

Then there was the Frenchman. He went to the zoo and sat in front of the elephants and then produced a little book of verses entitled, "L'Elephant et Ses Amours."

The Canadian, I am told, was a man from Winnipeg. He went to the wheat Pool to look at the latest quotations, then wrote a rather depressing article entitled, "The Elephant—A Prospective Market for Wheat."

By that time the man from the United States thought that something should be done about it. He started a card

index system with red, yellow, blue, green and white cards. He did not make much headway with the card index system and then he produced a book which sold at five dollars each, entitled, "Better and Bigger Elephants."

I think this story does give a background to the speech I am going to make and the things I am going to talk about presently—a background in the sense that it shows how confused a situation we have at the present time—confusion which does, to a large extent, come back to the national attitude in the various countries. When I received your invitation to speak on Hitler and the situation in Germany, I felt I was honored and grateful and, at the same time, somewhat perturbed. Honored, because it is a real privilege at any time to speak to a club like the Canadian Club which has an international standing. Perturbed, because it is not at all easy, at the present time, to speak on the German situation. As a matter of fact, it is even difficult to speak on that situation. It is not easy to analyse that situation because the country is in such an utter state of confusion. Things are moving with such astounding rapidity and I have been away now for over a month which means I have not been able to follow very closely the most recent developments. Newspaper reports, as one gets them, are definitely inadequate, for the simple reason the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press have been suppressed in Germany and that applies not only to Germany but to foreign correspondents. It is dangerous, in a sense, to speak on Hitler and his position for anyone who plans to return to Germany because, after all, it is passing now through a phase of dictatorship and it has got all the weaknesses which characterize dictatorships anywhere—the desire not to allow other men to express freely their opinions and say anything which may not be in the interests of the particular dictatorship. For this reason, you will appreciate my difficulty.

To understand what is happening in Germany, we have to go back, for the moment, to the earlier beginnings of the Hitler movement, and see what brought the movement into existence. I think, the first thing is to be found in the

Treaty of Versailles and subsequently in the predication of certain clauses by the Western powers. This Treaty meant for Germany, the transition from one of the most powerful nations in the world to what is, in a sense, a second rate nation with little power and with military and financial restrictions.

That transition was altogether too sudden and it is perfectly understandable that a very radical movement should have sprung into existence in opposition to that Treaty and the Hitler movement was one of them. The occupation of the Ruhr greatly contributed to the strengthening of the nationalist feeling in Germany. The second reason which helped the Hitler movement is to be found in the economic distress of the German people. That despair, the financial and economic difficulties go together, in a sense. Anyhow there are whole classes in Germany which became more and more poor classes. The hardship was felt particularly among the younger people who could not find any employment. After all, Canada has seen her depression in the last four years. The depression in Germany, with an interval of two or three years before 1928, has lasted since 1918. In my own particular work I have come up against this feeling of despair in universities. You have somewhere between sixty and seventy thousand young graduates—people who have gone through universities—who have nothing to go to. It is not surprising to-day that seventy per cent of the German students belong to the Hitler Party. They think, in that way, they have found a means to bring about a change in their situation and in that of their country.

The restrictions put upon Germany from abroad and the economic despair within Germany, I think, have to be held largely responsible for the growth of the Hitler movement, but we must take into account some other factors. The first one is the personality of Hitler himself. Hitler is one of the most powerful speakers I have ever heard. Hitler uses all the means and tricks of a demagogue. He speaks a very simple language and Hitler is always in the position of being in opposition to the existing government.

Hitler, when he speaks, appears to offer certain panaceas. He says in understandable language we have got to get rid of certain clauses in different treaties and everything will be all right. That is something the man on the street can understand. Even if the generalizations which Hitler uses are wrong, it is more likely that he will go farther than a responsible politician who will talk about controlled currencies and complicated matters which the man on the street does not understand. Of course, there are people in Germany who have not fallen under the spell of Hitler.

Another story is in circulation in Germany which rather characterizes Hitler. I am quite sure that story is not true. Hitler, I understand, was speaking one day in Munich and, as I said, he is a powerful speaker. He described the suffering of the German nation, told them how the young people were springing up and could not find employment. "And I ask you who is responsible for this?" he said. Silence. "I will tell you—the Jew." Great applause and as the applause died down a little voice cried out, "And the bakers' boys." Said Hitler, "Why the bakers' boys?" Said the little voice, "Why the Jew?"

One of the most important causes, however, even more important than the personality of Hitler are to be found in certain characteristics of German people themselves. The German nation for the last one hundred and fifty years has been educated in a spirit of discipline, in a spirit of submission to strong authority. Now, neither peace treaties nor the constitution of Weimac take account of that particular characteristic in the German people. Germany was not allowed to have a conscript army. Hitler uses those things. From the beginning, he demanded authoritarian government and again, from the beginning, he organized his own party on military lines. That is to say, he offered to the German people something they really wanted. They wanted discipline and authority. I think that fact alone explains to you the extraordinary way in which millions of Germans have joined the Hitler movement. There they see the possibility of new authority being set up and of new discipline being established within the country. All these reasons together, all these elements combined to bring Hitler power.

But with him there are two men, Von Papen and Hugenberg—both men fundamentally different from Hitler in their economic beliefs and in their idea of government. Von Papen, it is well known, is a monarchist and would like to see the establishment again of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Germany. Hugenberg is the strongest representative of vested interests in the country. That is to say, his interest is really with the maintenance of the old established order. They ran absolutely counter to election promises of Hitler who tried to introduce a new social order. The formation of that particular combination is altogether the work of Von Papen who has the full confidence of Hindenberg. In a sense, it is a masterpiece of political craftsmanship. Getting the idea, Von Papen and Hugenberg, in their negotiations for the formation of a new government, seem to have worked to get Hitler into the position of leader—a position which increased the ranks of his followers. Everyone had been dissatisfied with the unstable government in Germany for the last four or five years. Secondly, they wanted to confer power upon him with the understanding that within his government there should be men to prevent Hitler from carrying through more radical measures and to prevent Hitler from introducing a collectivist form of economic life. It was about the last moment to bring about that combination. If Hitler had been left alone much longer, he would have obtained an absolute majority in the country with no one able to control him. As it is, this combination has been established. Of course, during the last election, I think Von Papen and those who are with him, in a sense, sat back. I do not think they expected that the power of Hitler would increase as it did during the last election—so many additional Germans voted for him; about forty-four per cent of the German voters are on the side of Hitler.

I think Hitler will remain in power together with Von Papen and Hugenberg. That will mean that the government is going to be stable. I cannot say very stable. It is a government that, so far as economic policy at home goes, will introduce a certain measure of control over economic

enterprise in Germany. It is nothing new. After all, the banks in Germany have been controlled for a long time—shipping and railways have all been more or less under government control. All that will be maintained. No really important changes will occur. There will be no socialization of property in Germany—no expropriation of any kind. The government will, in many ways, follow the economic ideas of Italian philosophies in exercising state control and protecting vested interests in the country. Of course, many of the policies of the Hitler government will not appeal to the younger people, and many of these unfortunate, impoverished middle classes will want something different—some form of state socialism—and possibly a good many of them will return to the Communist group in the country. It may be that within the next six or seven months, the Communist voting power will increase from four and a half to eight million people. That is a mere estimate. However, it will not make the slightest difference to the government as there is not going to be an election. Secondly, even if the left parties in Germany should try to revolt against the present regime, the three men Hitler, Von Papen and Hugenberg,* have got the power necessary to put down any kind of revolt.

They have an armed police force of 100,000 men, a regular police force of about 400,000 men in the Hitler Storm Troops and approximately 400,000 Steel Helmets. That formidable lot of 1,000,000 is in a position to hold down the left wing parties in Germany. That makes me believe that the present government will remain in for a long time—two, five or ten years.

In view of that situation, it may be interesting to find out what is the foreign policy of that particular government. In parenthesis I might say there has been a persistent rumor of late that the present Minister of Foreign Affairs will be replaced by Von Papen. I think that is very likely. First of all, in the field of disarmament, I believe, it will, without doubt, follow the same policy adopted by previous governments. They will claim full equality of armaments. They will demand that. Once they have obtained that—

*Hugenberg is Director of Krupps.

if they obtain it—they will push as hard as they can for disarmament of other nations, not out of particular pacifist leanings but because they know they are not strong enough to arm up to the level of France or Great Britain. In other words, the only other alternative to achieve is that the other nations should disarm which is the policy of Italy. Italy and Germany will collaborate very closely in that policy. Then the second international policy is the union of Austria and Germany. Here again, there is no doubt that Hitler will try to effect that union of the two countries. However, in Austria the two ruling parties are opposed to the union. Opposed to Hitler are those two parties representing four-fifths of the total electorate in Austria. I think they will probably be in a position to resist this pressure which will be put upon Austria for union. So, there again, I do not think there are any very great changes to be expected in the European situation.

In the field of economic policy, too, the present government is not going to have a much different policy from that of previous governments. They will try to obtain industrial tariffs, but that is nothing new. In the field of monetary arrangements, there are international currencies and so forth. Again, the German government of Hitler will collaborate with any measure which is as much as previous governments have done. We must not forget, in spite of the revolutionary appearance of the present government, the men who really determine the economic policy of the country are the men who do want to protect vested interests and have stability. They will collaborate in any measure to clear up the confusion that exists in the monetary system of the world. There is only one point, I think, where the German policy, during the next few months, will become more aggressive than the policies of previous governments. The German Government, I think, without doubt, will put forward a very strong claim for the rectification of certain German frontiers and, certainly, within the next few months, a very, strong, formal demand will be put forward for the restitution of the Polish Corridor. It is difficult to see what is going to happen in

that field. I think only peaceful means will be employed. To begin with, Germany will invoke Article 19 of the Pact. At the same time, it is, of course, very unlikely that either Poland or France, which stands behind Poland, will accede to that request.

There are already alliances existing in Europe which are being strengthened in view of this coming fight for the rectification of frontiers—a fight not necessarily in the sense of a new war. On the one hand, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Austria, all countries out for the rectification of frontiers, have certain arrangements, made in 1919. On the other hand, the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, etc., have come closer together in the last few weeks.

If Germany does not obtain what she wants, certainly there will be more immediate danger of war than there is at the present time. Yet, while it is not possible to see clearly what will happen, I should say it is not likely that Germany would go to war. The military strength of Germany is not such as to wage a successful war against other countries—France in particular. Yet friction will remain. The situation in Europe will be uncertain all the time. From that point of view, the situation is really hopeless. Personally, I do think there are ways and means by which it would be possible to lessen the tension which exists in Europe and which is bound to grow. I believe that these ways and means lie in a closer collaboration of Great Britain, France and the United States, both in the field of disarmament and in the field of economic policy. We must not forget—here I am coming back to what I said in the beginning—radical movements have been born out of despair—a world in utter confusion—a world in which all economic forces seem to be working against each other—a world which is impoverished—is much more threatened by danger of war than a world with a certain amount of economic security; and a strengthening of the economic order, at the present time, can only be brought about by collaboration between the three countries I have named—France, Great Britain and the United States—collaboration

in the question of the settlement of debts—collaboration with regard to monetary policies and collaboration in the field of tariffs. Once such collaboration is achieved, there is no doubt, much more economic stability will exist in the world.

Once that is achieved, Germany will collaborate in this economic reconstruction of the world. Von Papen and Hugenberg will see to that. That is one and the first step—of course, a tremendous step—which ought to be taken to get the world away from the state of despair in which it finds itself at the present time.

There ought to be more collaboration in the field of disarmament. France, quite naturally, is afraid of a new war. France feels threatened—feels not only her own territory is in danger but that the territory of her closest allies is in danger. She knows if anything happens on the eastern frontier, she will not be able to keep out of the conflict. France, obviously, wants some more security. I think this is quite understandable in view of the present European situation.

That security she will only be able to have by way of closer collaboration—by way of a pact or an agreement to aid her in case of crises. She can only get that by way of collaboration with Great Britain and the United States. It should not be an alliance against Germany. These three countries are the most stable countries in the world and they should get together and work constructively for the strengthening of the present economic order. Of course, there is a certain tendency in Great Britain rather to seclude itself from Europe and get away from European entanglements. Here let me tell a story which illustrates the significance of that attitude. After a storm in the channel communications between Britain and the European Continent were cut off and the next day, I am told, an article appeared somewhere, it may have been *The Daily Mail*, entitled, "Storm in the Channel—Continent Isolated."

That attitude is not going to help in the present situation. I think we are indeed bound for a new catastrophe unless there is closer co-operation between France, Great

Britain and the United States. The peace of the world is threatened but the power to preserve it lies, at the present time, not so much in the hands of Germany, a country which is in a fever heat and not in a normal state, but lies really with the three countries I have mentioned, Great Britain, France and the United States.

CHAIRMAN CHALMERS:—Dr. Kotschnig, it is very evident to you the impression your remarks have made upon this audience. Let me refer to that story you told at the beginning. I think that the next occasion you tell it, you should add something about the Austrian. I think the title of the book would be something like, "The Elephant—A Lucid Account of What You Really Want to Know About Him."

Dr. Kotschnig has given no evidence of any prejudice or bias in his approach to any of the countries. This is due to the fact that he is travelling constantly round the world, to the fact that his home and headquarters are in Geneva and to the third fact that he married a Welsh girl. The clarity and brilliance of his English is a result of the fact that in his home English is spoken constantly.

Dr. Kotschnig, we thank you for your address. We hope that on your next visit you will come and give us another one.