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Germany To-Day

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DR. SIMONS:—Mr. Chairman, when I chose to depict Germany of today I did not expect that I had to speak under such dire circumstances. I expected Munich, somehow, would have settled events in Europe for a few months. Not in making them static, but in giving Germany an opportunity to develop peacefully in Eastern Europe. But today we see that Germany has missed that opportunity. The government was not content with what was offered it under the Munich agreements, and in the tension that exists today everyone should be extremely careful in analysing the situation.

I do not exaggerate the importance of words spoken, and yet I would ask you not to expect too sweeping statements from me today. I will try to speak with restraint, but I cannot even try to answer the questions that everybody is asking. What impressed me most in looking at what has happened in Czecho-Slovakia is the fact that Germany, by conquering that peaceful independent country has committed exactly the same error the government of 1914 committed when it violated the neutrality of Belgium. At that time I was a student of law, and I disliked that decision. I felt that the cause of Germany would be hurt, and I knew that the reaction of the world to that invasion would be a factor in the settlement of the conflict. It outraged the moral forces of the world, and I am deeply concerned about the effects of the present move. It took four years before the violation of the neutrality of Belgium was restored. It may take much longer before the present action of the Government, which cannot be justified by any argument, is fully answered by world opinion.

In 1914 I fought for the cause of my country, because it was impossible to oppose the government and be a good citizen. Today I am still opposed to the government, but I love my country as much as ever, and in opposing the government I have to go abroad. But being opposed to the government today does not mean that I would favor anything that would hurt the interests of the German people. I do not belong to the people who think that war would be the right instrument to settle domestic affairs. Any conflict, even on a local scale, is too high a price to pay for political change, and unfortunately we have to face the potentiality of war.

Let me say that in national socialism we find partly the rebirth of trends and movements which were part of the German national union as early as the beginning of last century. In 1812 Germany began to become nationalistic, and to dream of a greater empire in Europe. In that tradition there are elements of the old stories of the Teutonic knights, elements of the tradition of Hansa which was a monopoly and control of trade which carried the German influence deep into Russia. This German nationalism always looked for the incorporation of all Germans in Europe in one Reich. Even the incorporation of Austria was part of the old tradition. The Free movement of 1848 was still a nationalist movement—an attempt to create a free Germany and a greater Germany. In that tradition too there are elements of the pan-German League which justifies the establishment of a military class and led to the world war. It is always simple to find justification for national movements.

Two lessons were learned from the world war, one by Germany and one by the rest of the world. Germany learned that it was impossible to antagonise all the forces of the world at the same time and be victorious, that it could not establish the largest army, build the strongest navy, antagonise Britain and at the same time go east. The world learned that it was impossible for German politics to use self restraint, to be content with a good bargain. The treaties of Brest Litovsk and Bucharest are now forgotten treaties, but they were documents of German policy to which of necessity the world had to be opposed.

It is the fact of such traditions that makes National Socialism so strong in Germany, and it is not so much the imagination of its leader, as it is the ability of its leader to be the interpreter of the strong forces still alive in the people. It is impossible to say in a few minutes anything exhaustive about such a personality as that of Hitler. He is the Man who formulates the dreams and wishes that are part of the German history. Of course there are groups in the National Socialist party which cannot be identified with the German people. There is the group which has adopted the technique of terror, represented by Himmler. There are interests of a bureaucratic character, independent of the people, which are not identified with any particular group, but which hope to find in National Socialism satisfaction of their interests.

Capital still is interested in the control by the Reich of foreign territories, because it hopes to find a freer outlet for expansion, failing to realize that in no country that is under the control of Germany will they be likely to be any freer than it is in Germany itself.

Industry is hoping to find wider markets and greater profits in conquered territory than it can find in Germany, but it too will be disappointed for the control that exists in Germany will not be discontinued in any territories that Germany controls.

Farmers would like conquered territory to exploit. They have guarantees for their farms, but the land must go to their eldest sons. They cannot give it the second or third. These sons are working in labor camps and they dream of German conquest of lands where they can settle. But these conquests are not yet made, for the countries that have already been taken are densely populated and offer no prospects of establishment.

Finally the so-called middle classes who are disappointed at home are now looking forward to colonial conquests to provide positions for them, and greater power to rule that they never could exercise at home. It would be wrong to think that the National Socialist Party is able to unite and cultivate all these interests. One of the urges of German expansion is the need to divert these interests from the domestic to the international scene.

Then there is the army. It never was a political instrument, but since the storm troops have become the centre of military training the party is now the whole reservoir of the military spirit. The "Officer class" has been abolished and the officers are forbidden to form any different association from that of the men.

But what about the people themselves? To what extent is Germany National Socialist in spirit? To what extent is Hitler Germany?

As a political fact the reality today is that Germany is represented by its government to a far greater extent than is any other country, but that does not mean that in terms of future potentiality that Germany is Hitler. Hitler is not Germany, but we have to realize the very important fact that Hitler typifies some of the deepest needs of the German nation. That nation which suffered defeat in 1918 suffered an inferiority complex and one of its first urges was to forget the complex. Indeed, when Hindenburg was elected president it was an attempt to undo by vote the defeat of 1918. The General was a conqueror and somehow the people felt that with him as their leader defeat had been turned into victory. When Hitler came to power it was the result of a similar effort to forget that inferiority complex. They never learned to accept the decision of history and make a virtue of necessity.

Now though the German people in the fourth year of National Socialism feel equal to any country in the world and are convinced they could not possibly be beaten, they do not like to see that inferiority complex being turned into a superiority complex by a small group which insists on representing Germany as a superior race that is destined to rule the world. Any attempt to bolster up that superiority complex is resented by the German people. You should have seen the reaction last September when thousands went out of the way to record the fact that they dislike that sort of party superiority complex. The German people realize that such a complex is bound to antagonize the world, and that it will lead to war. They are afraid that Germany will start a fight.

The greatest result of Munich was the influence of Chamberlain on public opinion in Germany, for Germany

realized that this was an offer to keep the peace if Germany would do so. I have had many letters from German friends who wrote about this. They realized that an old man who had never been in the air, who had changed the habits of a lifetime, taken a plane and flown to Munich to swallow his pride and beg for peace, had no intention of attacking anybody, and no talk of encirclement will ever persuade the people that it is Germany who is going to have to defend herself. That is something of great importance because you cannot fight a war without the definite voluntary support of the people.

I would like to consider for a few moments the armed strengths of the opposing nations in this issue. I am no military expert, but I do know something of the facts. The army of Germany has not yet caught up with France in terms of trained reserves, and it would be further weakened by the half million men who will have to be left at home to maintain the work of government. Germany will suffer also by mobilizing more and more men from a definite labor shortage—far more so than will the countries that have colonies to draw upon.

Germany is certainly well equipped and vastly superior so far as aeroplanes are concerned, but while this might be an important, and in a short war, even a decisive factor, it will not count for so much in the long run. Her navy is very inferior compared with the British, but it is strong enough to keep the British fleet from the Baltic, and so for the time it may be enough. That is the military position. What of the economic. Germany in Peace can only maintain her present economic position through her access to eastern Europe. In the case of war she would undoubtedly be faced with a shortage of material as well as of labor.

Then comes the question of what combination of forces would develop in case of war; and nobody, including Chamberlain is in a position to say what force would line up against what other forces. There is not the slightest doubt that Germany is absolutely protected against French attack. I don't think any expert will pretend that the French army would be able to break through the German wall in the west, and the same is obviously true the other way round. Thus we have again to come to the conclusion

that the west will be from the start a stalemate that cannot be broken, and the fleet of Britain will be restricted to patrolling the high seas.

The really decisive alignment has to come from the east, and the German position turns on what forces are going to align themselves from that direction. There is no expert who will not agree that any successful action against Germany and Italy must turn on the active cooperation of the Soviet Union. She will have to decide whether she will give that cooperation or stay entirely out, and that will turn on what is going on in the far east. She could only act in central Europe if she were guaranteed against potential Japanese attack, and I have no way of knowing that the British Government is prepared to give such a guarantee.

In 1937, after three years of war, Europe had reached a state of stalemate, and though no one likes to be reminded of it, it is still true that the United States was needed to bring about a decision. It was then the physical and moral strength of the United States that decided the issue. Today it is the unknown position of the United States on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other that are more important factors than the wants of Hitler or Beck, or the efforts of any statesman in the maintenance of peace. Neither military force alone, nor economic strength alone can decide the issues of our time.

One of the most striking facts about Germany today is that the government is not committed to any definite line of policy. The state today is for all practical purposes neutral. It is not true that the government stands against communism, it has already accepted the important techniques of the collectivised form of government, and it is not true that it stands as a lone wall against bolshevism. No, the German government is still basically afraid to decide on a definite line of policy, internationally or domestically. It can turn against the west or against the east, but it is not ready yet to turn against both. Its only policy is to get what it can regardless of moral values.

On the other hand the western world, though it defends the status quo, and the fruits of its victory of 1918, is also defending certain values and traditions, it is defending the peaceful process of international dealings. The time to

have taken steps that would have led to permanent peace was immediately after the world war, but that would have been too much to expect. The trouble is that it took ten to twenty years before the world realized the need, and the dissatisfied countries are no longer prepared to wait now that the so called "haves" have realized how important such peaceful procedure is. If anything is to be done to avoid disaster it must be done quickly. Voluntary cooperation, and even sacrifices will be necessary, and even then I don't know if that will be enough to escape catastrophe. What I do know is that there has been a most momentous change occur in the realization of British and French statesmen that they now are faced with an unlimited, indefinable revolutionary force of a moral political expansion and they have to make their choice of what to do about it. In 1938 the choice was to avoid war at any cost. In 1939 they seem to be ready to fight if trouble comes. That is the only thing we have got during the past few weeks—moral preparedness. Whether it will work or not no one knows. I dare not make any forecast, because any forecast I might make would be colored by my wishes.

But I am still convinced that Germany is afraid of a two-front war. I am still convinced that the German government is afraid of any major war, but that it is ready to wage a local conflict—that it even would prefer a localized war to being allowed to gain its objective peacefully. Hitler would have preferred to wage war on Czecho-Slovakia, but only if he could have been certain there would be no intervention from the western powers.

That is true today, but he has a great fear of the guarantees given by the British and French, for they have created a situation in which a war could not be localized, and he would be faced with the possibility of a two-front war for which he is not ready.

These are the only calculable elements. I cannot read the mind of Herr Hitler, I cannot interpret the secret feelings of the German people. I would rather be proved wrong as a pessimist than an optimist, but I have a deep and abiding hope that the incalculable forces of the world will find some way to maintain peace.